Art | Theory | Criticism | Politics

OCTOBER

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$8.00/Spring 1990

Published by the MIT Press

OCTOBER

OCTOBER (ISSN 0162-2870) (ISBN 0-262-75202-6)
is published quarterly (Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring) by the MIT Press, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142, and London, England.
Subscriptions: individuals $25.00; institutions $60.00; students and retired $20.00. Foreign subscriptions outside USA and Canada add $12.00 for surface mail or $18.00 for air mail. Prices subject to change without notice.
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POSTMASTER: send address changes to OCTOBER, MIT Press Journals, 55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142.
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The Temptation of New Perspectives

STEPHEN MELVILLE

Let me begin by offering three rather disparate characterizations of these remarks.[1] They constitute, first, a sort of story about an interest literary theory might take or discover in art history; as such they sketch out if not an actual intellectual and institutional itinerary then something of the underlying logic of one. It is, I think, important here that this is not a story about the portability of theory or method but more a story about the way in which what is sometimes called theory reshapes or rediscovers itself within its new occasion.

My remarks might also be described as a sort of oblique introduction to certain writings by Jacques Derrida. Under this description, it will be a significant feature of my presentation that it falls somewhat short of its goal. Martin Heidegger produced, beginning in 1935, a piece of "aesthetics" under the title "The Origin of the Work of Art." In the late 1960s Meyer Schapiro threw his considerable professional weight behind a sharply administered art-historical correction to Heidegger's treatment of a particular van Gogh, with the clear intent of disposing of the apparent more general interest of Heidegger's speculations. In the mid '70s Derrida took up this argument in a complex "polylogue" called "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing" that seems aimed at least in part at renewing the philosophic interest of Heidegger's essay.[2] One question one might have about this sequence of writings is whether or not it is of any conceivable interest to art history; I want to suggest that it is, and I want to do so by a

1. Versions of this talk were given during 1987–88 at the University of California, Irvine, at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, and at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Since this is still very much a work in progress, I have preserved the informal oral style and tried to keep annotation to a minimum. I should acknowledge in advance my considerable debt to the various members of the NEH Institute on Art History, Theory, and Interpretation put together by Michael Holly and Keith Moxey during the summer of 1987.

2. Heidegger's essay is available in the essay collection *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York, Harper & Row, 1971. The Schapiro essay is in the Kurt Godstein Festschrift, *The Reach of Mind: Essays in Memory of Kurt Godstein*, New York, Springer Publishing Co., 1968; and Derrida's "Restitutions of the Truth in Pointing" is included in his *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

somewhat circuitous return to the speculative foundations of art history. If I do not now have much to say about the three essays in question, I am nonetheless working toward a certain description or redescription of the place in which the debate among them happens.

Finally, this reflection is an attempt to map, in an admittedly brief and preliminary fashion, something of the relations that may now bind together the notions of "theory," "postmodernity," and "art history." It is an attempt to say something about the kinds of challenge and possibility that may be facing the discipline of art history now.

I have already mentioned Derrida, and it should be clear in advance that my position is at least loosely deconstructionist.

Deconstruction presents itself as, in general, a practice of reading, a way of picking things up against their own grain, or at their margins, in order to show something about how they are structured by the very things they act to exclude from themselves, and so more or less subtlely to displace the structure within which such exclusions seem plausible or necessary. Like an analyst listening to an analysand, deconstruction attends to the other that haunts, organizes and disorganizes, a speech that takes itself to be in control of its meanings and identity. Deconstruction arises as a certain commitment to flux and to fluidity—rather like this essay, it rambles, circles, connects, and disconnects. In his *Blindness and Insight* the late Paul de Man offered a summary of Derrida's reading of Rousseau that still seems a good enough short introduction to deconstruction's typical and most easily standardized textual procedures:

> Whenever Rousseau designates the moment of unity that exists at the beginning of things, when desire coincides with enjoyment, the self and the other are united in the maternal warmth of their common origin, and consciousness speaks with the voice of truth, Derrida's interpretation shows, without leaving the text, that what is thus designated as a moment of presence always has to posit another, prior moment and so implicitly loses its status as a point of origin. . . . All attempts to trace writing back to a more original form of vocal utterance lead to the repetition of the disruptive experience that alienated the written word from experience in the first place.

The term *deconstruction* itself was coined by Derrida as, at least in part, an interpretation of a nest of terms in the philosophic writings of Martin Heidegger that had been variously rendered "destruction" and "retrieve." With these terms Heidegger attempted to name a relation to his tradition that was at once radically critical *of* and profoundly attached *to* it; for Heidegger, as for most continental philosophy after Hegel, the distinction frequently made in Anglo-American circles between being an historian of philosophy and actually doing philosophy is essentially senseless: one does philosophy out of its past and in

search of what remains in some sense concealed within that past. Derrida's revisionary translation of Heidegger's terms participates in this complex ambition, at once continuing and critiquing the deep lines of the Heideggerean project, and it accelerates the confounding of the reading of philosophy and the doing of it.

Given the weight this places on the act of reading, it is hardly surprising that Derrida's writings should have had a substantial effect on literary criticism. But, of course, crossing from philosophy to criticism and from France to America, deconstruction enters into engagement with different pasts and different conditions, and some of us at least are still concerned to understand the full weight of these differences.

The term "deconstruction" seems to have entered art talk primarily because of a perceived appropriateness to the effect of work frequently described as "postmodern." It has also gained some more general methodological purchase as a part of broader efforts to bring literary theory to bear upon the consideration of visual objects—as, for example, in the work of Norman Bryson. But there is certainly one other area in which one can imagine it intervening, and that would lie in the reading of the texts of art history itself. In the long run, these three areas are bound to be interconnected, and the surest index of this interconnection lies perhaps in the apparent naturalness with which one will speak, precisely, of "reading" a painting; deconstruction does not let such remarks pass as somehow "merely metaphorical."

To one who comes from literary theory, one of the most striking features of art history is what I might call its "foundedness." Literary criticism is, at least in this country, not founded in the way art history is: it took no special argument to invent departments for the study of literature, although it did take the construction of some special methods, more or less captured by the phrase "close reading." Literature departments are just that—literature departments; even if their curricula are for the most part organized by period, the essential element in their self-definition seems to be a notion of the rights or necessity of "literary language" and not, in the first instance, the historicity of their object. It was enough for I. A. Richards and others to find a way to read that could be justified in the face of very strong and particular philosophic pressures—generally associated with the project of logical positivism—for there to be English Departments.[3]

With art history we have a very different situation. There are founding texts, texts engaged in a struggle to define both an object and an account of our access to it. The work of Riegl, Wölfflin, Panofsky, and others is quite different from that of the founders of academic literary criticism; it is more densely

3. Michael Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985) is particularly interesting here; to a high degree it seems to reinvent the terms of New Criticism within a project that is historical in a way quite alien to the New Critics.

engaged with a philosophic past—above all an Hegelian past—that seems at once to offer to it and to deprive it of the very same object; my questions will be about how far art history can be said to have mastered this past in establishing a certain past as its object. It should be noted in advance that the philosophic past at issue here is one the discipline shares to a significant degree with the tradition that eventuates in Derrida's philosophic work of reading and writing.

This is then a sort of report on work in progress in which I have been trying to make some sense of these founding struggles, to read in them the scars and fissures by which they are still marked and which can open again at any moment—and which are indeed perhaps being forcibly opened now under the impress of a new inflection of the modern. The argument I offer here is partial in every sense: tendentious, incomplete in its arguments and evidence, and committed to a certain finitude of appearings.

Whatever interest the works that concern us may have held for observers throughout the course of what we now call the history of art, that history in its specific visibility becomes possible only at a certain moment within the Western tradition, and this moment is firmly moored to the name of Hegel, whose claim that art has come to an end—has become, that is, merely historical—engenders both an object and a question about our access to it.

Hegel's claim, as I understand it, is not so much that the artistic impulse has exhausted itself as much as it is that an impulse once inchoate and buried in the terms of its world has become now detached and explicit, and that with this achievement it passes over into the still greater explicitness of philosophy. From Hegel's vantage what had been lived variously as ornament, religion, memorial, and so on shows itself to have formed a single history, a story of what is now visible as art. The concept of art is thus bound up with the notion of its end; its achievement is inseparable from its pastness—art comes to presence and explicitness precisely as historical, as already overcome. It is in this sense that one might see or sense in Hegel a certain registration of the museum as the essential site of art (although, to the best of my knowledge, the word "museum" does not appear in Hegel's writings). One might thus be led to think of what are now called "institutional theories of art" as coeval with the emergence of art itself.

I want to note a couple of consequences of this view.

A first is the inscription of a permanent worry about context within the project of art history: precisely because the becoming available of art is the story of its detachment from context, there will be a deep tension within the art-historical project between the historicity of its object, the rhythms that organize art as art, and the history in or through which works were lived. This tension seems now most visible in the form of a conflict between the claim to achievement and the claims of context and condition, between the masterpiece and its social history. Institutional theories of art derive such power as they have from their apparent ability to span—or obliterate—some versions of this gap, but they are perhaps better taken as symptoms of it, intimately entangled with the extraordi-

narily difficult relation of art history and modern art. One mark of the postmodern—I am thinking of the work of someone like Hans Haacke—lies in its impulse to address this entanglement as art and not as a theory of art.

These considerations may point us toward a second consequence of the Hegelian account of art: that the emergence of art as a properly historical object is contemporaneous with the possibility of claiming to make art *as* art. The same history that produces the possibility of art history produces the possibility of modernism in art, and the two possibilities are linked in the thought, which I borrow from Stanley Cavell, that modernism is well defined as the having of the past as a problem. It bears remarking here that these twinned possibilities do not and in general cannot face one another, falling as they do on opposite slopes of the cusp that is the becoming explicit or objective of art. If art history and modernism in art are tied to one another, they nonetheless do not stand fully in one another's view. One thing the recently entered claims to "postmodernism" may mean is just that this relation has achieved a certain kind of availability for us: that modernism itself can now appear to us as historical, and that art history can now be seen as in some specifiable sense modernist. A full acknowledgment of the postmodern would then entail not simply the addition of a period to the normal art history curriculum but a reevaluation of the discipline itself.

A third consequence of the Hegelian view can set us toward such a work of revision. For those moved to lay out the terms of art history in Hegel's wake, a certain argumentative course is laid out in advance. A Hegelianizing history of art must give some account of its own coming to be, and this means an account, explicit or not, of the becoming historical of art in the North, in Germany above all. It seems to me important that whatever else Wölfflin and Riegl are doing, they are also offering a story about how art history emerges as a Northern discipline. The failure of this offering—a breaking with Hegelian kinds of narrative—would then be an important feature of what art history has been for us. The full story of this failure is not simply intellectual or argumentative; it is a story of war and immigrations, of translations made and not made, of the construction and fate of Germany, and of the propping of that construction on an imagination of Greece and in the face of another, prior claim to Renaissance. It is a story that knots together a nation, its poets and philosophers, Hölderlin and Hegel, Nietzsche and Burckhardt, in ways I cannot pretend to understand. "America" too would have its place in this story. What I offer instead is a few thoughts about Riegl and Wölfflin and Panofsky.

The Hegelian task assigned to the German founders of art history is extraordinarily complex. A casual index of this complexity may perhaps be found in the recurrence of the term "late" in the titles of major works by both Riegl and Wölfflin. It seems important to notice this as a description not only of the periods under central consideration but of an interest in "lateness" or "belatedness" inscribed within the founding task. "Lateness" seems to encode or allegorize beyond chronology interests in being both German and post-Hegelian as well

as an uncertainty about when art history comes on the scene in relation to the actual history of art. One might recall here Hegel's assertion that "philosophy always arrives on the scene too late"—an assertion through which philosophy assumes or is condemned to the burden of modernism. One might also note that these resonances might well cease to be heard in the different philosophical climate of, for example, America.

If under the impress of Hegelian logic and historiography, the question of art history is inseparable from the question of the becoming historical of art, the theoretical foundations of the discipline will be laid only through accounts of the history of art. These accounts will have as one major task the avoidance of any overt reliance upon the Hegelian schematizations that end by reducing an apparent history of vision to a real history of philosophic knowledge and self-consciousness on the one hand, or to a transient and historically regional science within a larger logic on the other.

Alois Riegl, for example, seems to play peek-a-boo with the dialectic, giving us what appear to be analyses from significantly different methodological positions of disparate empirical moments within the history of art. And yet something seems to bind just those moments together, thus justifying Riegl's claim that with his study of the later Roman art industry, the story of art attains closure. And indeed Riegl's work does seem to sketch out a certain systematic dialectic within which methodological variation shows itself as a dialectically driven development like that of the consciousness that journeys through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—we have an initial moment of the self-unfolding of sheer artistic will and attention in the *Stilfragen*, a later moment of transformation that imposes upon that sheer will an awareness of its being for another, and a final moment in which that other is explicitly posed as a human, and Northern, subject. Across the movement from palmette motifs to late Roman art to the group portrait, the initial brute fact of "attention"—and its subsidiary terms of "feeling" and "will"—becomes the highly complex fact of a Northern audience or witness to the historicality of art. Punning implicitly, perhaps unconsciously, but nonetheless powerfully against Hegel, this narrative is one of the freeing of art from the haptic *grasp* of the Concept to an opticality standing in permanent need of a beholder to guarantee its objectivity. Hegel is thus revised back toward Kant, inscribing a permanent formalism among the constituent elements of the emergent field. This revisionary move remains difficult for art history, at once enabling its objectivity in the face of the threat of its absorption into mere intellectual history and risking the detachment of those objects from the thicker prose of the world in which they gained their initial shape and human purchase.

The tension engendered here can be seen to animate centrally the work of Wölfflin as it struggles to assert the "two roots of style," and finds that difference between what might be said to be internal and external to art repeated within what is claimed to be purely internal. As I understand the intention of Wölfflin's argument in his *Principles*, it is in part to justify both classical and Northern

baroque, with their linked subpolarities, as distinct and equally legitimate modes of representation. Each yields a valid presentation of things—on the one hand "as they are" and on the other "as they appear." Further, both modes are defined primarily not by any relation, adequate or otherwise, to things, but by their ability to sustain visual presentation—the painterly giving us things as "pure seeings," sheer visual presences, and the linear giving us, with equal claim to the truth of painting, the fact of material surface and planar extent.

When, however, we protest against Wölfflin's formalism and isolation of the visual from the larger world, we are registering an effect of the text that outraces the argument it would embody. To recognize this is to extend the implications of Marshall Brown's deconstructive reading of Wölfflin's *Principles* and his argument about the primacy of the baroque and impossibility of the classical as such, which we can now recognize as itself a version of the question of things-as-they-are/things-as-they-appear.[4] It is the baroque impulse alone that moves toward a purification of vision apart from material conditions or bodily/conceptual graspings. That is, if one takes Wölfflin's *intention* seriously one has to postulate an original and irreducible duplicity to such key terms as "vision" and "surface." But in doing so, one loses the stable and principled object of the disciplined or disciplinary history of vision, so the text works always to displace its major insight to the margins in order to ensure an apparent stability at the center. If Brown is right that the classical becomes actual only and always in the baroque, the cast-out impurity of its proper and impossible image of vision returns as the always deferred or excluded "second root of style" (so this nondialectic of classical and baroque threatens to betray art history again to Kant). This renegotiation of the distinction between haptic and optic is not without its costs: in particular, one loses the distinction between, and interlacing of, internal and external form that underlay Riegl's understanding of the place of the art historian and that gave his account its dialectical energy. What one gains is something like a method, an analytic vocabulary, propped up on what seems to be the discovery and isolation of the proper object of a history of vision.

One index of the continuing instability of Wölfflin's object appears in the complex bundle of references to language at work in the text *Principles*. On the one hand, his five founding polarities introduce a recognizably linguistic model for art history, surprisingly close to Saussure's. Given the strong diacritical

4. "The explanation of this historiographical muddle—which points to the core of Wölfflin's achievement—is both unmistakably implicit and, at one key point, inescapably explicit. Classic art is absent, silent, static, or even dead; baroque art is present, vocal, and alive. The difference between classic and baroque that rationalizes Wölfflin's system and that establishes at once their radical opposition and their total identity is quite simply this: that *the classic does not exist*. It never existed and can never have existed, for when the classic comes into existence or manifests itself, it does so in the form of existence, which is the baroque. The classic *is* the baroque. This is not a speculative judgment about Wölfflin. It is precisely what he says." Marshall Brown, "The Classic Is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 9, no. 2 (December 1982), p. 397.

tendency of Wölfflin's polarities, it becomes natural to speak of our "reading" of one or another feature as "marked" in one way or another . The language of art would be structured by diacritical contrasts of linear/painterly, open/closed, and so on. At the same time, however, Wölfflin casts each individual term within these oppositions as itself amounting to a language; these two levels of linguistic analogy are run constantly together in his text, thus tangling together problems of translation and representation. Such terms as "one's own language" or "mode of representation as such" introduce a deep complication to notions of medium, genre, and relation within art history. This uncertainty within Wölfflin's text about the level at which a linguistic analogy is to enter the account seems of a piece with the other uncertainties about internal and external roots of style and the classical and the baroque that I have tried, too briefly, to chart here: all of them, I suggest, work both to maintain a constant reference to reading within the field of the history of vision, and to maintain it as at once fleeting and natural, something like a metaphor—but a metaphor without which one cannot quite manage, a catechresis then.

There is a sense in which we may be tempted to think of Riegl certainly, and Wölfflin largely, as ancient history, not yet really art history. With Panofsky we seem to step into an altogether different register, one in which the founding of art history is an achieved fact. But I think this sense is perhaps well understood as the effect of a text of extraordinary power.[5]

Certainly one element in our sense of Panofsky's difference lies in the distance he takes from the "Northern" problematic that seemed to impose itself on both Riegl and Wölfflin. Whereas in Wölfflin, key terms ("thing in itself," "thing as it appears") can, from paragraph to paragraph and often undecidably, be given variously Kantian or Hegelian inflections, in Panofsky, Kant unequivocally presides and the explicit problematic of historicality recedes. The "Kant" in question here is also quite particular: given the state of Kant's German inheritance in the early part of this century, Panofsky could, in effect, have moved either toward the neo-Kantian tendencies that culminate in the work of Ernst Cassirer or toward the more radical revision of Kant set in motion by Heidegger. And Panofsky's choice was, clearly, for Cassirer. Panofsky thus turns away from the arguably most powerful inheritors of Hegel in his tradition—Nietzsche and Heidegger. This choice is reflected in Panofsky's effort to read the necessarily hermeneutical activity of art history as a constrained passage from the "natural" to the "essential," the circularity of which can be held at bay and is essentially inconsequential.[6] One can say that Schapiro's much later attack on Heidegger in

5. I seem to recall Michael Prodro speaking aptly in this respect of Panofsky's "deft dreamwork."
6. In terms of present discussion within literary theory, Panofsky ends up holding a position much like that of E. D. Hirsch rather than that of Hans Georg Gadamer or other still more radical receivers of Heidegger.

effect replays this early reduction of interpretive implication within one's object to questions of methodology distinct from the historicity of the object.

One consequence of this choice appears to be a return to the valorization of Italian art that now seems to be defining art history in its traditional practice.[7] But we will not have given an adequate account of this until we have described not only how the retreat from Hegelian and Heideggerrean considerations of historicity de-emphasizes the question of Northern art, but also how Panofsky finds within Italian art a more compelling articulation of the terms of our access to the past. Both Michael Podro and Michael Holly have convincingly located this new articulation in the essay "Perspective as Symbolic Form," with its explicit dependence on Cassirer. It is, I think, hard to find a succinct formulation for what Panofsky manages here: I suppose I want to say that he finds in the Renaissance a period that delivers us from what might seem the debilitating fact of periodicity by finding in it an optical model that can liberate us from our situations. History lies before us much as we might imagine nature to, available to our view. What I want to stress here is that any critique of the "privileging" of the Italian Renaissance in art history will be empty and merely resentful insofar as it does not recognize that such privileging is not in any simple sense arbitrary. It is not the case that one could take Panofsky's science and correct its untoward privilegings. Its privileges are continuous with its ability to have an object at all. To put it somewhat differently: what we call access to the past is always redescribable in terms of privilege and appropriation, and to give up one is to give up the other. To step outside of such privilege is to cease to have an object and to fall into the merely empirical or willful.

Panofsky's essay acts, across its manifold difficulties, to forge an art historical subject whose distance from and responsiveness to his or her objects, is, if not fully natural, at least fully rational. The Renaissance achievement of rational perspective becomes the condition of possibility of the art historical discipline, and we are compelled to its terms whenever we look to establish another world view that would not, for example, privilege the Renaissance, because we can neither "look" nor imagine a "world view" without reinstalling at the heart of our project the terms only the Renaissance can expound for us.

The way to Panofsky's understanding of the objectivity of art history lies through the Renaissance because that Renaissance provides the means to elide questions of the becoming historical of art; his valorization of perspective forges an apparently nonproblematic access of the rationalized space of the past. We are

7. That this is indeed a "return" points toward a nest of questions about the "prehistory" of academic art history—questions that will remain unposed and unaddressed here but which would certainly belong to any fuller and more formal treatment of the issues. Addressing these further questions will, it seems to me, not affect the analysis offered here as much as it will complicate one's understanding of the critical terms in play and render more difficult the idea of any simple escape from the norms of traditional art history.

freed then to imagine ourselves henceforth as scientists of a certain kind, and within this imagination the grounds of privilege become invisible and profoundly naturalized. The shift away from Hegel and toward the assumptions and interests of Anglo-American philosophy is an essential part of this reimagining of art history, as is the psychologization of such key inherited terms as "schema."[8] With this, Riegl, and Wölfflin, the speculative past of art history itself comes to seem mere prehistory, the proto-science from which art history has elevated itself.

This altogether-too-brief sketch means then to suggest that the achievement of art history can also be thought of—and perhaps must be thought of—as a forgetting of itself and its object. Just as for Heidegger and Derrida philosophy can and must be thought of as a forgetting of itself and its object—which is hardly to say that with them philosophy ends. It is, however, to say that the conditions of its continuation become radically complex and self-critical, something Derrida tries to make explicit by packing Heidegger's interest in both philosophy and the destruction of philosophy into the commodious portmanteau of "deconstruction."

My story has brought the notion of perspective to a position of particular prominence, and I want, in closing, to note some of the ways in which we may now, under the impress of a new inflection of the modern, want to say that the invocation of perspective can and must be thought of as a forgetting of perspective, a forgetting of the fact that we are always situated and presented with a partial view. I will try to bring this back around to some large-scale considerations about the discipline of art history, but it is perhaps worth noting some of the small-scale questions that are here in tow: Why is it natural to us to speak of an introductory survey course as providing "perspective"? What would it be like to imagine that an introductory course in something in particular could provide "perspective"—that is, the seeing of something from somewhere, rather than the seeing of everything from nowhere? What if the survey were the achievement and not the precondition? I will shortly be trying to say something about photography and here too there are small questions in tow: What is a slide projector? How simple or complex a tool is it? Is its use a contingent fact about art history, or is it more intimately bound to the structure of the field? I don't have answers for these questions; it is enough for me, at the moment, that they can find a place within an exploration of the intellectual foundations of art history.

Our ordinary uses of the word "perspective" are oddly divided: we claim it on the one hand as what gives us the world more or less just as it is, and on the other as a name for what divides us one from another. You have your perspective and I have mine—and yet the perspective rendering has as good a claim on public truth as anything we can imagine. Something of this division surely

8. One does well to note here the radically different direction in which Heidegger extends the notion of the schematism in his writings on Kant.

informs the recurrent, often strangely senseless, arguments about whether perspective is "natural" or "conventional"—the moral of these arguments may just be that perspective pushes us up against deep incoherences in our normal sense of these words, which would then also be deep incoherences in our understandings of how we stand with or toward one another.

However we come down on these questions, it is clear that our involvements with the notion of perspective cannot be confined to considerations of pictorial practice; the word haunts our images of knowledge from the moment we imagine that the best model for the grasping of sense lies in the seeing of an idea, an *eidos*, to the Nietzschean moment in which we appeal explicitly to something named "perspectivism" as a way of moving beyond the falsification of the world through a vision of its beyond. "Perspective" never was a practice art history simply found within its purview, which is why Panofsky's formulation of it had the power to wrest a discipline from its historical embeddedness and transform it into a science. This would also be why certain reformulations of it may pose a deep challenge to the terms of that science as a whole and provide an impetus to the rereading of texts whose founding power and radical complexity are half-forgotten.

I am thinking here particularly of the ways in which certain discussions of postmodernism turn crucially on the fact of the camera.

The camera is most simply a machine for producing automatic linear perspective renditions of the world. It can of course do other things, including give the lie to this automatism, but it is for the present enough that it can do this one thing. Because it can do this one thing, it is frequently tempting to see it as spelling out an end of art, or of painting, or of a certain kind of painting. But I don't think this is what is finally interesting about the camera. What matters for at least some recent writing on photography and postmodernism is that in fulfilling a certain dream of vision—the dream, more or less, of an eye gazing out upon its world—the camera exerts effects that go beyond and turn against that dream: it gives us that world as profoundly textual, even in its very moment of appearing, or it gives us that world as a *source* as well as an object of vision.[9] It can compel us to return to, reengage with, the early grapplings with the apparent duplicity and self-division of vision; it can return us even to the baroque and seemingly gratuitous complexity of the models and experiments through which the Renaissance found its way to rational perspective.[10] It may be tempting to say here something familiar like "postmodernism offers us a new perspective on the past," but what needs to be said is something more like, "postmodernism compels a rethinking of the way in which we imagine 'perspective' to offer us an

9. I am here abstracting and drawing implications from some of the recent writings of Rosalind Krauss, writings which in their turn rely heavily on the work of Jacques Lacan and Georges Bataille.
10. I think particularly of the recent work of Hubert Damisch.

access to the past." It is perhaps worth noting that it follows from this that whatever "postmodernism" is, it is not quite a period term and it is not quite, within the existing terms of art history, ar art historical object; it is more nearly a way in which attention can be drawn to certain "grammatical"—a term I prefer to "methodological"—difficulties in our talk of periodization and objectivity. What defines the postmodern within an art history curriculum is a certain slippage between it and the received terms of that curriculum.

I have described the camera as a linear perspective machine and I have seemed to make a certain challenge to art history dependent upon its existence. But this mere machine can no more bear such a weight than the mere facts of brush, pigment, and surface could bear the weight of painting in general. It takes a certain history and a certain art history for this description of the camera to become compelling, to let it impose itself not simply as a description but a challenge. The art historical story about modernism that I follow says that the camera can matter in this way only in the wake of painterly claims to the achievement of something like pure opticality. But my interest lies here with the subject of art history and not its object, so I would like to close by locating the camera on the Heideggerean route not taken by Panofsky.

Heidegger's thought about art, like Hegel's, is tied to a thought about modernity, which Heidegger describes as a sort of fall into what one can only call blinding lucidity—a flat availability of objects to our view, our calculation, and our research, as if we were frozen into a permanent midday, the world freed of its burden of shadow. It names this modernity "the age of the world as picture" and glosses it in terms of the reign of the "Ge-stell," usually rendered as the "frame." It is a feature of this flat availability of things that among the things available are, hanging "on the wall, like a rifle or a hat," works of art. And because these pictures hang there in just this way, they offer us no access to the fact that our world too has come to hang before us like a picture—but it is also the case that if we could come to understand what a picture is we might come again to understand what a world is.[11] We stand poised for Heidegger between a mere aestheticism and some other grasp of the work of art, and what poses us there Heidegger calls "technology." I am calling it, for now, within a certain history of art, "the camera." Heidegger's counter-appeals are too often palpably and weakly Romantic—he hears the unalienated voice of the peasant in his proximity to the earth; he hopes for a god and an *eschaton*. In his best moments he knows that none of this will do; that there is nothing saving apart from the very danger itself; that, for example, the very thing that materializes the world as picture might also renew for us a sense of why it is that pictures matter, releasing us from the noontide demon's grasp.

11. See Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, especially "The Age of the World Picture," trans. William Lovitt, New York, Harper & Row, 1977.

And here I will stop. I have come a certain way toward turning a full circle, ending with the Heidegger from whom Derrida actively translates "deconstruction" and I have tried to show something about how art history and the history of art history might be at issue within that movement. I have tried to stop at a particular place, a site of textual controversy in which both vision and reading are at stake. On the wall hangs a van Gogh, about whose value we know everything and nothing. Before it, arguing, gesturing, and pointing, stand Martin Heidegger and Meyer Schapiro. Watching it and them, reading it and them, writing, there is now Jacques Derrida, as well. His writing scatters into indefinite and unspecifiable voices. What do "perspective," "frame," and "vision" mean here? What kind of history is this? Where do "we" stand? What discipline, what patience, and what violence is called for here?

Lenin at a parade of the Vseobuch in Red Square.
Moscow, May 25, 1919.

The Kinetic Icon in the Work of Mourning: Prolegomena to the Analysis of a Textual System*

ANNETTE MICHELSON

Opening the volume of Panofsky's lectures on funerary art, published in 1964 as *Tomb Sculpture,* I find the following introductory passage:

> An art historian can approach the subject of these lectures only with the greatest trepidation. Trespassing upon the preserve of many adjacent disciplines (classical and oriental archeology, Egyptology, the history of religion and superstition, philosophy and several others), he has to rely largely on secondary sources and often finds himself confronted with a diversity of opinions, at times about crucial points which he, as a rank outsider, cannot presume to evaluate. . . . To make things worse there is hardly any sphere of human experience where rationally incompatible beliefs so easily coexist and where prelogical, one might also say metalogical, feelings so stubbornly survive in periods of advanced civilization as in our attitude towards the dead.[1]

As I prepare to offer a reading of *Three Songs of Lenin*, that monument of cinematic hagiography, I must adopt this apologetic stance as my own—and with, perhaps, a stronger sense of trepidation; for cinema studies, as a discipline, depends upon an even wider spectrum of established fields of inquiry (these include art history, linguistics, and psychoanalysis). And the prelogical irrationality of incompatible beliefs with respect to death is compounded by the contradictions of the fetishism inscribed within the cinematic institution.

* The preparation of this lecture, delivered in the fall of 1987 at the Woodrow Wilson Center, in Washington, DC, was completed during my tenure as Ailsa Mellon Bruce Scholar at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art. I wish to express my gratitude for the Center's generous assistance in the furthering of the larger project, *Intellectual Cinema and Its Vicissitudes*, of which this text forms a sub-section.

1. Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*, New York, H. N. Abrams, 1964, p. 9.

I do now begin, however—and with a double epigraph: the first one from the text of the anti-iconoclastic doctrine promulgated by the Orthodox Council of 787: "An icon of Christ represents Him in His human nature; those who reject such icons reduce the mystery of the Incarnation to a phantom."

The second text, which has considerably greater currency within film studies, I draw from Barthes's *Camera Lucida*: "The life of someone whose existence has somewhat preceded our own encloses within its particularity the very tension of History, its division. History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it."[2]

Among Dziga Vertov's films, *Three Songs of Lenin* enjoys a privileged status; it is, indeed, the only film of Vertov's to which immediate, unanimous, and enduring approval was extended within the Soviet Union. Its wide distribution and prompt incorporation into the canon of officially endorsed films generated the publication, in 1962, of N. P. Abramov's slender, illustrated monograph by the press of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. It is the fact rather than the text of this publication that commands our interest, confirming our sense that the history of this film's reception is unique.

Responding in 1934 to its cordial reception, Vertov himself was, however, at pains to stress the continuity of this work with his previous production, a production contested in the Soviet Union, as we know, throughout the preceding decade. Thus he notes that "creating kinopravda about Lenin—even within the confines of a theme strictly limited by the assignment—required making use of all previous experience of kino-eye filmings, all acquired knowledge; it meant the registration and careful study of all our previous work on this theme."[3] He then proclaims that "the elimination of falsity, the achievement of that sincerity and clarity noted by critics in *Three Songs of Lenin* [and we note the prior left-handed salute of approbation inscribed in this acknowledgment] required exceptionally complex editing. In this respect the experience of *The Man with a Movie Camera*, *One-Sixth of the World*, of *Enthusiasm* and *The Eleventh Year* were of great help to our production group. These were, so to speak, 'films that beget films.'"[4]

The entire production of the group of Kinoki organized and administered by Vertov, as chairman of their executive Council of Three between 1924 and the moment which now engages us, was commissioned by specific agencies for specific ends. Thus, *Forward, Soviet!* (1925) had been ordered by the Moscow Soviet as a demonstration of the progress made during the immediately post-revolutionary construction of the new administrative capital of the socialist state; *One-Sixth of the World* (1926) was commissioned by the Gostorg, the Bureau of

2. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 65.
3. Dziga Vertov, "I Wish to Share My Experience" (1934), in Annette Michelson, ed., *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, trans. Kevin O'Brien, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984, p. 120.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Foreign Trade; *The Eleventh Year* (1928) was a tenth-anniversary celebration of advances in hydroelectric power; and *Enthusiasm* (1930), Vertov's first sound film and still, to this day, the most advanced in its use of concrete sound, celebrated the Stakhanovist acceleration of mining and agriculture in the Don Basin. *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) stands alone as Vertov's wholly autonomous meta-cinematic celebration of filmmaking as a mode of production and, as I have elsewhere claimed, a mode of epistemological inquiry.[5] Of *Three Songs of Lenin*, commissioned for the tenth anniversary of Lenin's death (and it was, of course, one of several such commissions), I shall offer a reading directed toward the location of its precise signification, its political function within the historical situation of the USSR in the 1930s. That effort of location will engage a number of considerations, psychoanalytically grounded, across a variety of artistic and discursive practices. I shall, of course, be bracketing the extensive descriptive task entailed in this reading. I shall want, however, to attend to some of the particulars of Vertov's own account of its production:

> Undiscovered and unpublished shots of the living Lenin had to be found. This was done with the greatest patience and persistence by my assistant, Comrade Svilova [Vertov's editor and fellow member, together with Boris Kaufman, of the Council of Three], who reported ten new film clippings of the living Lenin for the tenth anniversary of his death. For this purpose, Comrade Svilova studied over six hundred kilometers of positive and negative footage located in various cities of the Soviet Union.
>
> A search for documents on the Civil War had to be made, since our film, *A History of the Civil War*, turned out to have been split up and sorted out under different titles in warehouses, and it was impossible to locate it whole anywhere.
>
> We had to transfer Lenin's actual voice [in the one extant recording] onto film. Shtro, the sound engineer [the author of the remarkable sound score of *Enthusiasm*], succeeded in doing this after a whole series of experiments.
>
> A great deal of work was involved in searching out and recording Turkish, Turkmen, and Uzbek folk songs about Lenin. Along with synchronous sound shooting, it was necessary to shoot a whole series of silent sequences in various parts of the Soviet Union, starting with the Kara-Kum desert and ending with the arrival of the Cheliuskin crew in Moscow.[6]

5. See my "'The Man with a Movie Camera': From Magician to Epistemologist," *Artforum*, vol. X, no. 7 (February 1971), pp. 60–72.
6. The name of a celebrated Arctic expeditionary group whose long-delayed return was an occasion for general public rejoicing.

And all of that was done only as work preliminary to the editing, to gather the essential footage.

The footage then was subjected to laboratory processing in order to improve the quality of the image and sound.[7]

Here, then, is a film which, in its combination of archival material and freshly filmed footage—the latter both silent and in synchronous sound—straddles the boundary between sound and silence. Its discourse is propelled by copious intertitling as well as by music and speech. Vertov tells us, in a text entitled "Without Words,"

> More than ten thousand words of song texts, remarks, monologues, speeches by Lenin and others were recorded on tape. After editing and the final trimming, about thirteen hundred words (1,070 in Russian and the rest in other languages) went into the film. Nevertheless, H. G. Wells declared: "Had not a single word been translated for me I should have understood the entire film from the first shot to the last. The thoughts and nuances of the film all reach me and act upon me without the help of words."[8]

Vertov makes, as we have seen, extensive use of archival material documenting Lenin's political trajectory and his funeral. This material had been shot in the immediately postrevolutionary period, between 1919 and 1924, by the working group Kinoki, headed by Vertov, Kaufman, and Svilova. The film's governing trope establishes a tripartite structure, animated by the folk tradition of the female mourner, as three songs by the women of the eastern (Moslem) and Ukrainian Republics in tribute to their dead liberator, the leader and initiator of an internationally supported revolution within one country.

Three elements remain to be mentioned. The central panel of this triptych, with its funeral of Lenin, shot by Vertov and his co-workers in 1924, offers us a group portrait (composed according to the prevailing canon of 1934) of the revolutionary generation: Lunacharsky, Dzerzhinsky, Kalinin, Krupskaya, Clara Zetkin, and, of course, Stalin. And it is in this section that a series of elaborate variations of that existent material are produced through the deployment of optical devices specific to cinema: loop printing, super-imposition, freeze-frame, stretch printing, slowed motion.

Vertov is the master of these processes, and he had formulated in a number of now celebrated texts the origins of his cinematic work within and through them.

7. Vertov, "I Wish to Share my Experience," in *Kino-Eye* . . . , pp. 102–121.
8. Dziga Vertov, "Without Words," in *Kino-Eye* . . . , p. 117. A crucial sequence of intertitles is translated below, on pages 37–38.

Clara Zetkin at Lenin's funeral, 1924. (From Three Songs of Lenin, *1934.)*

I remember my debut in cinema. It was quite odd. It involved not my filming but my jumping one-and-a-half stories from a summer house beside a grotto of no. 7, Malyi Gnezdnikovsky Lane.

The cameraman was ordered to record my jump in such a way that my entire fall, my facial expression, all my thoughts, etc., would be seen. I went up to the grotto's edge, jumped off, gestured as with a veil, and went on.[9]

He then describes the results. What Dziga Vertov saw in that recording was fear, indecision in approach, growing resolution, the jump undertaken in apprehension, the sense of being off-balance, the minute adjustments of the body to renewed contact, the shock of impact upon hitting the ground, and a slight sense of chagrin. He saw, then, what he termed *kinopravda*, truth revealed by the camera eye and inaccessible hitherto. Film thus appeared to him as the radically new and crucial instrument of inquiry and analysis. In this he was not alone. There is, among his contemporaries in the period following the World War (these include Elie Faure, Sergei Eisenstein, Walter Benjamin, and Jean Epstein) a generally shared epistemological euphoria which animates the film theory and practice of that era. I cite, as one example, Epstein's view: "Take a man accused

9. Dziga Vertov, "*Three Songs of Lenin* and Kino-Eye," in *Kino-Eye* . . . , p. 123.

of a crime, film him in slow motion, and you will see the truth revealed upon his face."

But Epstein's concern lay deeper; he claimed that little or no attention had been paid to the many unique qualities film can give to the representation of things. Hardly anyone had realized that "the cinematic image carries a warning of something monstrous, that it bears a subtle venom which could corrupt the entire rational order so painstakingly imagined in the destiny of the universe."

And the subversion of that rational order is seen as containing the development of science itself.

> Discovery always means learning that objects are not as we had believed them to be; to know more, one must first abandon the most evident certainties of established knowledge. Although not certain, it is not inconceivable that what appears to us as a strange perversity, a surprising nonconformity, as a transgression and a defect to the screen's animated images might serve to advance another step into that terrible underside of things, terrifying even to Pasteur's pragmatism. . . . Now, the cinematograph seems to be a mysterious mechanism intended to assess the false accuracy of Zeno's argument about the arrow; it is intended for the analysis of the subtle metamorphosis of stasis into mobility, of empty into solid, of discontinuous into continuous, a transformation as stupefying as the generation of life from inanimate elements.[10]

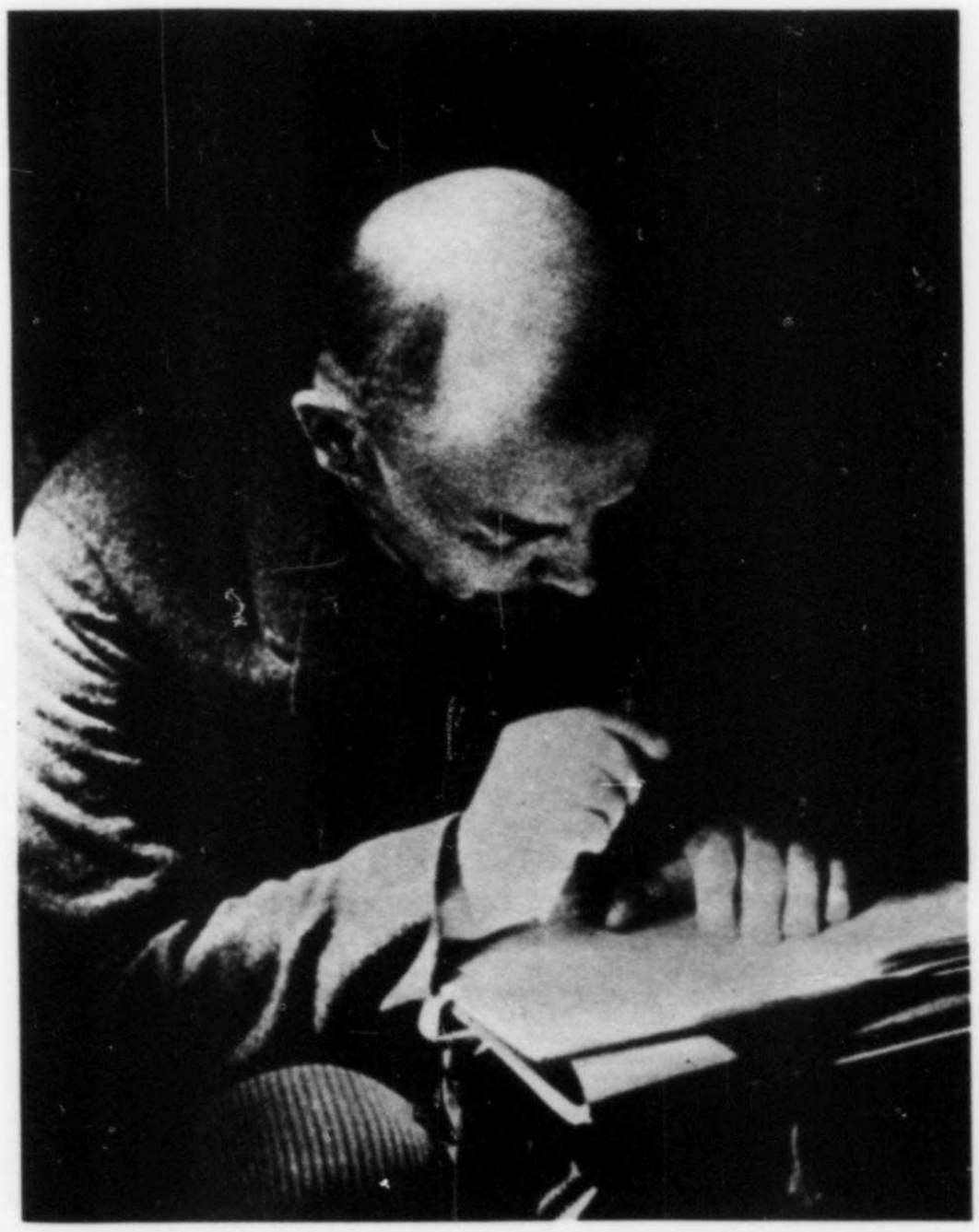
It is Vertov's sense of the revelation of truth inscribed in his slow-motion leap across a void that determines his choice of what were called the anomalies of cinematic process, synthesized in that summa of cinematic techniques and achievements of the silent era, *The Man with a Movie Camera*. It is in this film that Vertov spelled out most explicitly the strategies mobilized in the celebratory analysis of cinematic representation that had animated his theory and practice of an entire decade. To them we must add one, whose significance and significant absence from *Three Songs of Lenin* we will want to note: that of the reversal of motion deployed by Vertov as a heuristic strategy in an unequaled manner beginning with his earliest feature (*Kino-Glaz*, 1925). The heady delights of the editing table (and the expanding distribution of the VCR, which has by now delivered them into the hands of a large section of our population) offer the sense of control through repetition, acceleration, deceleration, arrest in freeze-frame, release, and reversal of movement that is inseparable from the thrill of power. Roland Barthes remarked that history is divided in two, not by the invention of cinema, but by that of the still photograph; one wants, rather, to say that history has been divided (and the world ended) many times, and that the advent of

10. Jean Epstein, *Ecrits sur le cinéma*, Paris, 1973, pp. 257–263.

cinema represents one of those deep divisions: the euphoria one feels at the editing table is that of a sharpening cognitive focus and of a ludic sovereignty, grounded in that deep gratification of a fantasy of infantile omnipotence open to those who, since 1896, have played, as never before in the world's history, with the continuum of temporality and the logic of causality.

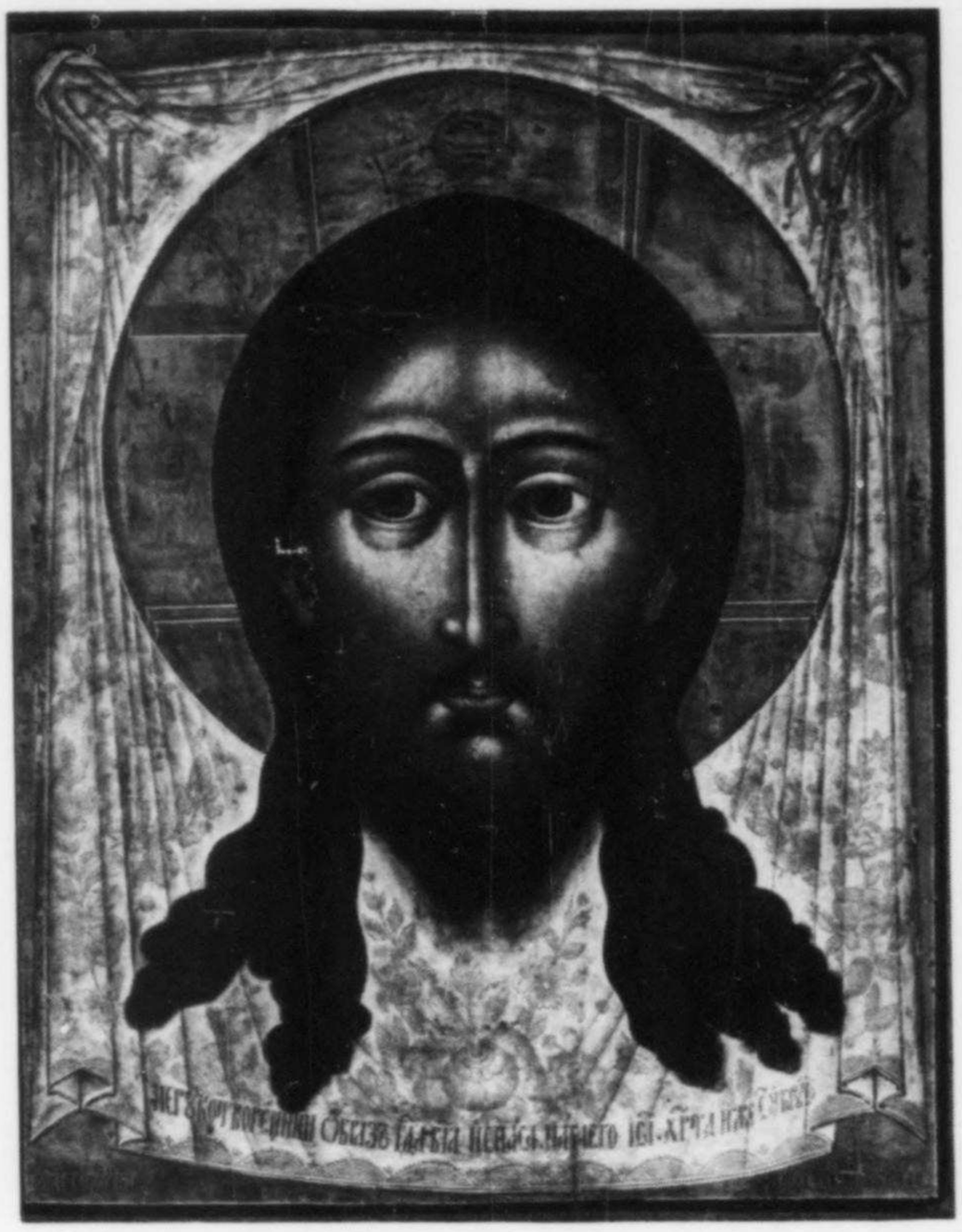
These anomalies Vertov now deployed in the construction of a cinematic monument, and at a pace which is that of the funeral rite in all its somber decorum, performed to the incantations of the female mourners and the music of nineteenth-century romanticism: Chopin and Wagner. I shall want, then, to claim that, in its paean of praise to the "Living Liberator," in its insistent deployment of the images of the quotidian—Lenin correcting a manuscript, greeting a delegation of workers, accepting a bouquet from children, strolling and chatting in the Kremlin court (all these images have been catalogued, indexed, and republished, frame by frame, together with dates and provenance in a widely distributed volume published by the Marx-Lenin Institute)[11]—*Three Songs of Lenin* corresponds to the register and order of imagery, originating in

11. Lenin, *Sobranie fotografii i kinokadrov*, vol. II, *Kinokadryi* (1918–1922), Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1972.



Lenin at a session of the Third Congress of the Communist International in the Kremlin, Moscow. June 28, 1921.

Iconostasis, St. Sophia Cathedral, Novgorod. 16th century.



Simon Ushakov. A version of the Image of Christ Not Made by Human Hands. *Late 17th century.*

the art of Byzantium, imported into Russia in the tenth century, traditional in the celebration of saints and martyrs, of Saviour and Paraclete. Their deployment, moreover, in a filmic triptych's central panel, flanked by the tributes of mourning survivors, the women of the Socialist Republics, amplifies this notion. I am, in fact, tempted further to claim that the register, order, scale, and function of *Three Songs of Lenin* make of it more than a kinetic icon; it is a veritable iconostasis.

Let us posit, to begin with, the simplest, incontestable view that the icon in the Eastern church is a representation of a sacred personage, and that the representation itself is regarded as participating in the sacred nature of its referent; the nature of that participation is still to be specified. The image, however, according to Methodius, Patriarch of the Orthodox church, is honored though not adored; it is venerated, not worshipped—a nice distinction.[12] The

12. "We maintain the Laws of the Church as observed by our Fathers, we make painted images, with our mouths and our hearts we venerate them . . . those of Christ and the Saints. The honor and veneration addressed to the image derives from the prototype: such is God's doctrine, which we follow, and with faith we cry unto Christ! Blessed be the Lord. . . ." [author's trans.], Methodius, *Song 6, Canon of Matins*, quoted in Egon Sendler, *L'icône: image de l'invisible*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, n.d. p. 36.

The Virgin of Hodegetria of Georgia, *Leningrad. First half of the 16th century.*

St. George and the Dragon, with fourteen scenes, *Leningrad. Early 14th century.*

icon, again in a provisional formation, derives not all that distantly from the Egyptian portraits of the dead, placed in mummy cases, so as to be visible from within the mummy bands. The likeness, double, or *Ka* took the place in the grave of a mystic and vivifying image; it articulated the link between departed soul and deserted body preserved in the form of the mummy. (And we now have, in Nina Tumarkin's splendid—and hilarious—study of the establishment of the Lenin cult the entire history of Lenin's mummification and its role in the formation of the cult.)[13]

At this point we might want to ask, "How does an icon differ from a portrait?" But we might first more properly ask, "How does it resemble a film?" and find part of the answer to the first question inscribed in the answer to the second.

Icons, like films, require special care in preservation, frequent restoration, and steady temperature. The Russian icon was generally designed for exhibition on a specific site, in a church or a home. The research and inquiry into the history of the icon is extremely recent, beginning only in the nineteenth century.

13. Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!* Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1984.

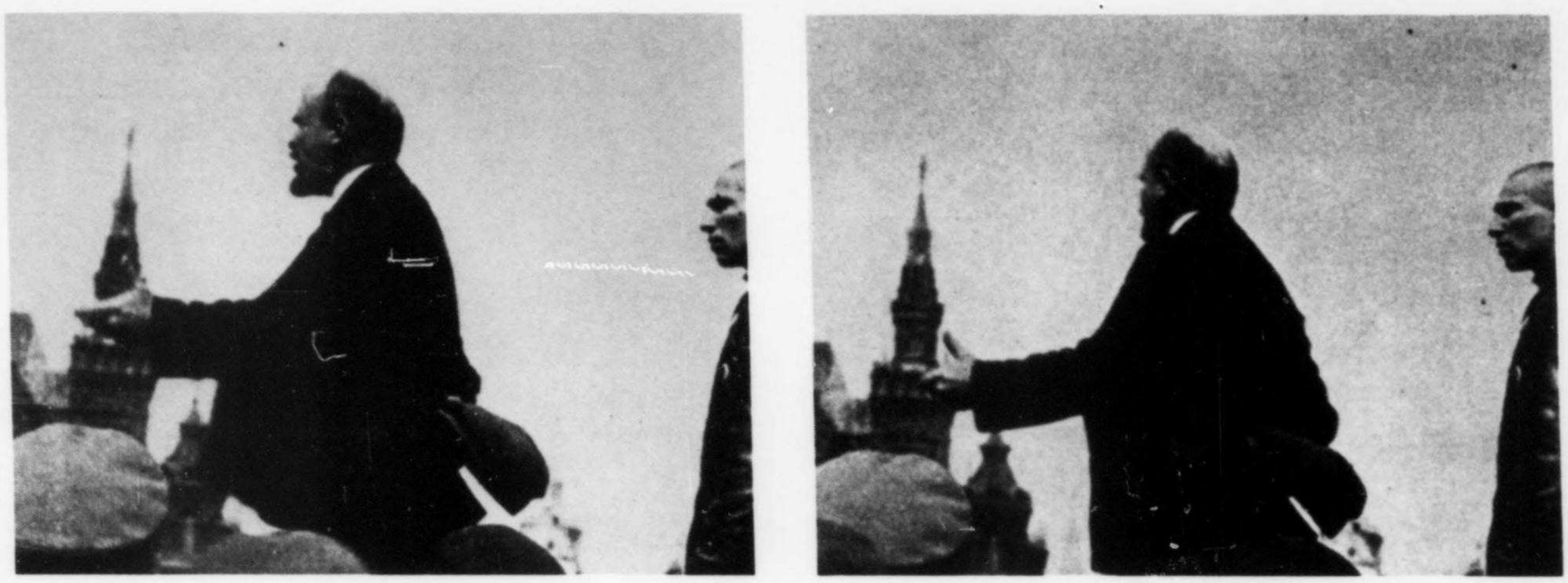
And although tradition has it that the finest icons are those attributable to a single hand (we recognize the shadow of a *théorie de l'auteur*), production developed toward a division of labor such that by the seventeenth century the celebrated Simon Ushakov specialized in the painting of faces. By this time, too, the narrative icon has developed out of the earlier, simpler episodes, and the portrait panel, as a more elaborate narrative form.

More interesting, and more telling perhaps, than all of this is one of the icon's salient features: the inclusion of that which is known variously as the *ozhivka* (from *ozhivat*, "to enlighten") or *dvizhka* (from *dvigat'*, "to move") or the *svetik* ("little gleam"); all of these refer to the glint in the pupil of the eye which confers light and, through light, movement, and, through both of these, the semblance of life or presence on the portrait within the icon. The formal qualities of icons involve, similarly, idealization of physical traits, solemnity, rhythmical repetition, the representation of the saint's or martyr's life in episodes, and the view of the saint in quotidian existence, together with friends, donors, children, worshipers, mourners, disciples. One wants, as well, to emphasize the role of textual support, of inscription, title, nomenclature. Thus, *Our Lady of the Burning Bush*, *The Virgin Hodegetria* (*She Who Shows the Way*), *Our Lady the Cloud of Light*: *Lenin the Icebreaker*, *Lenin Bringer of Light* (in the process of electrification which will complete and consummate the construction of socialism and which generates so many visual metaphors in Vertov's oeuvre).

One wants, finally, to stress the status of those icons, holiest of all and closest to the nature of the sacred relic: the acheiropoietic, which are in Russian termed *nerukotvornyi*. These are images not made by (human) hands, not painted, but allegedly created by contact with and emanation from a sacred personage—rather like those crafted by the Pencil of Nature and later, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, animated in movement by the brothers Lumière.[14] Upon the faith in a special status of the *nerukotvornyi* image in a paradigmatic instance, the shroud of Turin, André Bazin, as we know, constructed his cinematic ontology.

I am claiming that we may speak of the transformation of Christian themes of martyr and saint, of Saviour and Paraclete at the heart of a Leninist iconography constructed across the Soviet culture generally, but most immediately and forcefully articulated in Vertov's textual system. Of Lenin, as of Gregory the Great, it is declared that his "universal benefits are proclaimed everywhere and forever—causing the dead man to live on earth." To Elizaveta Svilova, Vertov's assistant, fell the task of searching out, collecting, and preserving those fragments of film, those recordings of the living Lenin from all over the Soviet Union.

14. For a discussion of acheiropoietic image, I have relied in part upon Ernst Kitzinger in W. Eugene Kleinbauer, ed., *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West: Selected Studies*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1976.



Lenin at a parade of the Vseobuch in Red Square, Moscow. May 25, 1919.

Vertov makes this quite clear in yet another text in which he pays tribute to the great patience and persistence of Svilova in the presentation of this work in which, as he says, "the image, 'Lenin is Springtime,' traverses the entire film and develops parallel to other themes."[15] Like Helena in search of the True Cross, Svilova is then lauded as she who has collected relics of the living Lenin.

In the Orthodox church the sanctuary (chancel), where the sacrament of the Eucharist is celebrated, is divided from the rest of the interior (nave), where the congregation stands, by the iconostasis.[16] This consists of several tiers of icons usually forming a solid wooden screen. The iconostasis is pierced by three doors. When opened, the large center door (the Royal Door), penetrated only by priest and ruler, affords a view through to the altar. The doorway is closed by double gates, behind which hangs a curtain or veil.

The signification of each part of the Orthodox church is derived from its architectural location and its function in the course of the liturgy. The interplay between the immaterial and the sensory worlds is denoted by the sanctuary and the nave. At the same time, both these parts constitute an indivisible whole in which the immaterial serves as an example to the sensory, reminding man of his original transgression. For Saint Simeon of Thessalonika, the narthex corresponded to earth, the church to heaven, and the holy sanctuary to what is above heaven. Consequently, all the paintings in the church, especially those constituting the iconostasis, are arranged according to this symbolism.

The sanctuary screen was originally brought to Russia from Byzantium. At first, directly above the Royal Door was an icon of the Saviour flanked by the Mother of God on the right side and Saint John the Baptist on the left side. These

15. Dziga Vertov, "My Latest Experiment," in *Kino-Eye* . . . , p. 137.
16. For the history of the iconostasis in the Russian Orthodox church, see Nathalie Labrecque-Pervouchine, *L'iconostase: Une évolution historique en Russie*, Montreal, Editions Bellarmin, 1982.

form the so-called Deesis. The Saviour and the Mother of God are seen as mediators between heaven and earth and thus occupy a central position in the iconostasis. Similarly, the iconostasis is located on the boundary line between the human and the divine. It would then be—and indeed will be—the task of my more complete project to pursue an analysis of the kinetic iconostasis as boundary, of the homology proposed in relation to the architectural and pictorial models here invoked.

I will resist the temptation to pursue this homology here, however, in favor of another line of inquiry suggested by *Three Songs of Lenin*'s particularly complex convergence of the iconic and the indexical, an inquiry which I find somewhat more urgent at this point—more enticing, at any rate. Since it opens onto so large a cluster of problems, I cannot hope to do more than indicate some possibilities for further illumination of the film we are considering. I return, then, to my provisional characterization of the icon as participating in some as yet unspecified manner in the sacred character of the personage depicted.

It is obvious that I have collapsed two senses of the iconic into the word—that which refers to the category of sign that portrays or illustrates its referent and that which we know as the highly developed genre of Byzantine and Russian painting. But this Lenin film, composed of shots made during the lifetime of the Living Liberator (and the word *zhiv* carries the meanings of "alive," "lively,"

(Left.) Banner reads **Lenin Ours Immortally.**

The Vernicle, ***Novgorod (?). 16th century.***

"living," and "animate"), this work which proclaims his life beyond the grave, answers, at the very least, to some of the formal and the thematic conventions of the *pictorial* tradition; its manner of portrayal and composition involves, as it were, a transvaluation of pictorial values into filmic ones; and surely, to cite but one example, in the long sequence of the body lying in state in the House of the Trade Unions prior to the funeral, we recognize a dormition (like that of the Virgin, whose sleep preceded her ascension).

The notion of the icon as in some way participating in the sacred presence of the figured personage is grounded in the doctrine of the Incarnation, as expressed in Paul's view: Christ is an image as well as an emanation of God. One would, then, have to say that He is the acheiropoietic or *nerukotovornyi* icon par excellence. The earliest example in recorded history of such an icon made by direct emanation is the legendary contemporary portrait of Christ supposed to have been painted for Abgar IV, King of Osrhoene, found in Edessa, Mesopotamia in 544 and taken in 944 to Constantinople. It was presumed to be a portrait made from the living model, because, unlike Veronica's veil, it had no crown of thorns. And the earliest image of the *Virgin Hodegetria (She Who Shows the Way)*, presumably painted by St. Luke, had been blessed by the Virgin herself. These earliest of icons bear the mark of contiguity, of emanation; they are indexical.

Lenin in Red Swuare during the parade of the Vseobuch troops, Moscow. May 25, 1919.

Mourning woman as seen in Three Songs of Lenin *(1934).*

If the history of Western church art tends, with a significant steadiness, in the direction of the illustrative function of the holy image, Gregory the Great (600) saw them as writing for the illiterate. It was the great debate within the Eastern church which produced a split within theology between the primacy of manifestation and that of representation. The iconoclasts, banning images, nevertheless decorated their architecture with enormous splendor; iconoclasm was directed at the mediation of the image as impeding access to the Real Presence. Western art develops toward a system of depictive representation, highly conventionalized, constructed; but the reality of the manifest presence of the divine is seen by the Eastern church as theoretically, spiritually prior to depiction. It is ten centuries later that the photograph once again reopens the question of the icon, of the image as both image and emanation, and it does so by offering once again the icon which is acheiropoietic, or *nerukotvornyi*, not made by hands, traced by that light of which Plotinus says that it gives life and color to all things. Modernist painting will, of course, produce a new iconoclasm through Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian, anthroposophists all. Alone among them, Malevich will grapple with the problem of cinematic representation in a debate with Eisenstein upon

which I have touched elsewhere.[17] The very title of Malevich's polemical text of 1925 is, of course, an expression of the contempt for what he saw as the revival of a regressive system of representation: "And Images Triumph on the Screen!"

What cannot be denied, however (and Malevich does not deny it; he merely eludes the problem), is that every still photograph is, as Roland Barthes declared, "a certificate of presence," the ostensive declaration that "this has been." And if the photograph does exist in a realm located somewhere between the relic and the fetish object, it derives strength from its relation to its referent. Epstein had, with his extraordinary acuity, seen the epistemological interest of the place of the still photograph in film (the French word for photography being *instantané*); he had seen that the still photograph cuts into time, causing a kind of gap, bringing it to an instant of arrest, and that cinema, grounded in the persistence of vision, hypostasizes our inability to think that gap in time.

If the still photograph is abstracted from referential time, it becomes, as

17. See Annette Michelson, "Reading Eisenstein Reading *Capital* (Part 2)," *October*, no. 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 82–89.

Philippe Dubois has termed it in his extremely interesting study, *L'acte photographique*, a kind of "thanatography."[18] One can then say that it inserts, within our experience of lived time, the extratemporality of death. And it is this that gives to the freeze-frame and to other cinematic forms of temporal digression their particular effect of power. Within the flow of cinematic representation, that semblance of temporality itself, we can insert this arrest that figures the perpetual freezing of the image as a kind of posthumous life within the flow of the film. The image, thus released from that flow, and from that of the narrative syntagm, attains extratemporality. And if it has taken so long a time to produce an interesting theorization of the photographic, it may be that the West has been reluctant fully to confront its intimation of the thanatographic function, deferring it for a century and a half.

If we now recall *Three Songs of Lenin* that elaborate iconic celebration of the life, the works, death, ascension, and afterlife of the Living Liberator as work of mourning, we can easily locate the moment, the sequence which most crucially epitomizes the mourning function of the film; I will return to that sequence, but not before I have brought to bear upon this reading some more general considerations on the work—this work—of mourning.

18. Philippe Dubois, *L'acte photographique*, Paris and Brussels, Nathan and Labor, 1983.

Mourning woman as seen in Three Songs of Lenin *(1934).*

For it is, I feel, truly necessary to pursue an investigation of the source of funerary ritual within which the role of the female mourner is inscribed. Clearly, within the ethnic communities represented in the Lenin film, the work of mourning is women's work. And Vertov draws upon the extremely rich tradition of the oral lament, which traverses the corpus of Russian literature and was, for his own generation, as extended in the lament for Lenin written and published by Mayakovsky.

The funeral ceremony and its articulation in accompanying laments derive from practices within the tribal order in which the sense of the dead—of the murdered father—is felt as a potentially powerful threat, such that it behooves the mourner to seek protection through magic. The theater of mourning and of commemorative ritual are generated by that magical action. Although they, like most aspects of social life, are, with the gradual effacement of the tribal order, transformed and undergo a process of privatization, they still retain aspects of their origins, of the rites and customs characteristic of tribal structure.[19] (We find, by the way, a clear and vivid representation of this in the ethnographic

19. See Geza Roheim, *Social Anthropology*, New York, International University Press, 1950, p. 358.

Lenin Mausoleum *in Red Square, Moscow. October 1930.*

Lenin dead in Gorki. January 1924.

masterwork of Kalatazov and Tretyakov, *Salt for Svanetia* [1930], a film that incurred the regime's strong disapproval for its sumptuous representation of these vestiges surviving in the Caucasus during the period of the Five Year Plan.)

The elaborate funeral rites (laying out, washing, clothing the body, providing of food and drink and other presumed amenities) and their prescribed sequencing are to be seen as acts of propitiation, all informed, as Geza Roheim has pointed out, by a denial of genitality which is the price of the dead soul's accession to paradise or to immortality. Funeral and commemorative ceremonies thus anticipate the manner in which the survivors strive to honor and appease the dead, convinced of their invisible and conceivably punitive presence. (We must not forget that Lenin had been the victim of an aborted assassination attempt from which he emerged in seriously weakened condition.)

The chants, lamentations, songs, weepings, wailings, cries, and other expressions of grief were so directed. For funeral laments were integral to the Russian burial ceremony. Proficient criers, weepers, wailers, lamenters, and chanters were generally familiar with the rank or order of the company and its ceremony, for they were guided by well-established rules and traditions. As

funerals were conducted with some strictness, a definite sequence of themes was observed, and members of the family were addressed or called upon in a definite order to participate in the lamentation. We know that in addition to the chants rendered by professional wailers, each in the name of a specific relation, chants were also performed by each of the kinswomen; these were traditionally a genre of women's poetry. It was a form of accomplishment expected of women, and a comparatively easy one, since in the composition of the funeral chant a large role was played by traditional devices, appeals, and formulas, a store of which, we are told, "was inevitably lodged in the memory of everyone who lived in the even tenor of the patriarchal mode of life." We are dealing, then, with a highly coded form of literary expression.

The celebrated wailer, Irina Andreyevna Fedosova, related to E. V. Barson, a collector of folklore, more than thirty thousand lines of wedding, funeral, and recruiting laments.[20] Maxim Gorky described Fedosova in "The Wailer," published in *The Odessa News*, when he encountered her at the Nizhny Novgorod fair in 1896. She was over ninety years old.

> But wails—the wails of a Russian woman, weeping over her bitter fate—constantly burst forth from the dry lips of the poetess; they burst forth and they awaken in the soul such poignant anguish, such pain, so close to the heart is every note of these motifs, truly Russian, sparing in their delineation, not distinguished by diversity of variations—no! But full of feeling, sincerity, power and of all that which is no more, which you do not find in the poetry of the art's practitioners and theoreticians, not in Figner and Merezhkovsky, nor Fofonov nor Mikhailov, nor any of those people who utter sounds with no content. Fedosova was imbued with the Russian lament; for about seventy years she lived by it, chanting the woe of life in the old Russian songs. . . . A Russian song is Russian history, and the illiterate old woman, Fedosova, whose memory contains thirty thousand verses, understands this far better than many very literate people.

Icon and funeral chant. Having now isolated two determinant components of this textual system, I pass to an account of its function within the given historical moment of its production, that of 1934 within the Soviet Union. It is the psychoanalytical theorization of the work of mourning that enables us to grasp its political signification. I turn, naturally, to the initiating text of Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," drafted in 1915 and completed in 1917. Its moment of production is, then, that of World War I, and it is worth noting the existence of another text of the same period, "Topics for the Times on War and

20. See E. V. Barson, *Lamentations of the Northern Region*, vol. I (1872), vol. II (1882), vol. III (1886), Moscow. I am indebted, for knowledge of this source, to Sally Banes.

Death" (1915). I shall want, however, to specify, in addition to the singular interest of the theorization of the work of mourning that followed in the ethnologically informed research of Geza Roheim, Melanie Klein's extension of Freud's analysis as a basis for the establishment of the depressive position.

Freud's central concern in his original text was the nature of neurotic melancholia. He therefore begins by proposing "to try to throw some light on the nature of melancholia by comparing it with the normal affect of mourning." Mourning is thus the background, the point of departure, for the analysis of melancholia.

> Although mourning involves grave departure from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition. . . . We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless or even harmful. . . . Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world—in so far as it does not recall him—the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it, that this attitude does not seem to us pathological. . . .
>
> In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist? . . . Reality testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition—it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and there is a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful-psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried through bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect to it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course

> by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.[21]

Kleinian theory instructs us that every object loss involves a sadistic triumph of a manic order, difficult to tolerate by the conscious subject.[22] It is the refusal or the negation of that triumph which blocks—either temporarily or definitively—the work of mourning. Guilt and remorse for aggressive fantasies explain the work of mourning. Any object loss, according to Klein, reopens the original subject of object loss, revivifying an archaic attitude or level of ego: the depressive position.

Let me now attach to a reading of these theorizing texts that of Vertov's intertitles, focusing upon those of the third and final song, chant, or lament:

72. T H I R D S O N G (hand-lettered)
73. "In Moscow . . ."
74. "Ah, in the great city of stone . . ."
75. "On the square stands a 'tent' . . ."
76. "The 'tent' where Lenin lies . . ."
77. "Go in your grief to that 'tent' . . ."
78. "Look at Lenin . . . and . . ."
79. "Your sorrow will dissolve as in water . . ."
80. "Your sorrow will scatter like leaves . . ."
81. "Lenin can dissolve your grief . . ."
82. "Lenin can give you courage . . ."
83. Stalin, great pupil of the great Lenin, carries on the fight . . .
84. To build a Socialist land of mass-luxury . . .
85. Machinery is now the weapon . . .
86. DNIEPROSTROY
87. The world's largest hydro-electric dam . . .
88. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
89. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
90. "OUR OIL!"
91. "OUR COAL!"
92. "OUR METAL!"
93. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"
94. "OUR MAGNITOGORSK . . ."
95. "Our mighty Baltic-White Sea Canal . . ."
96. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"

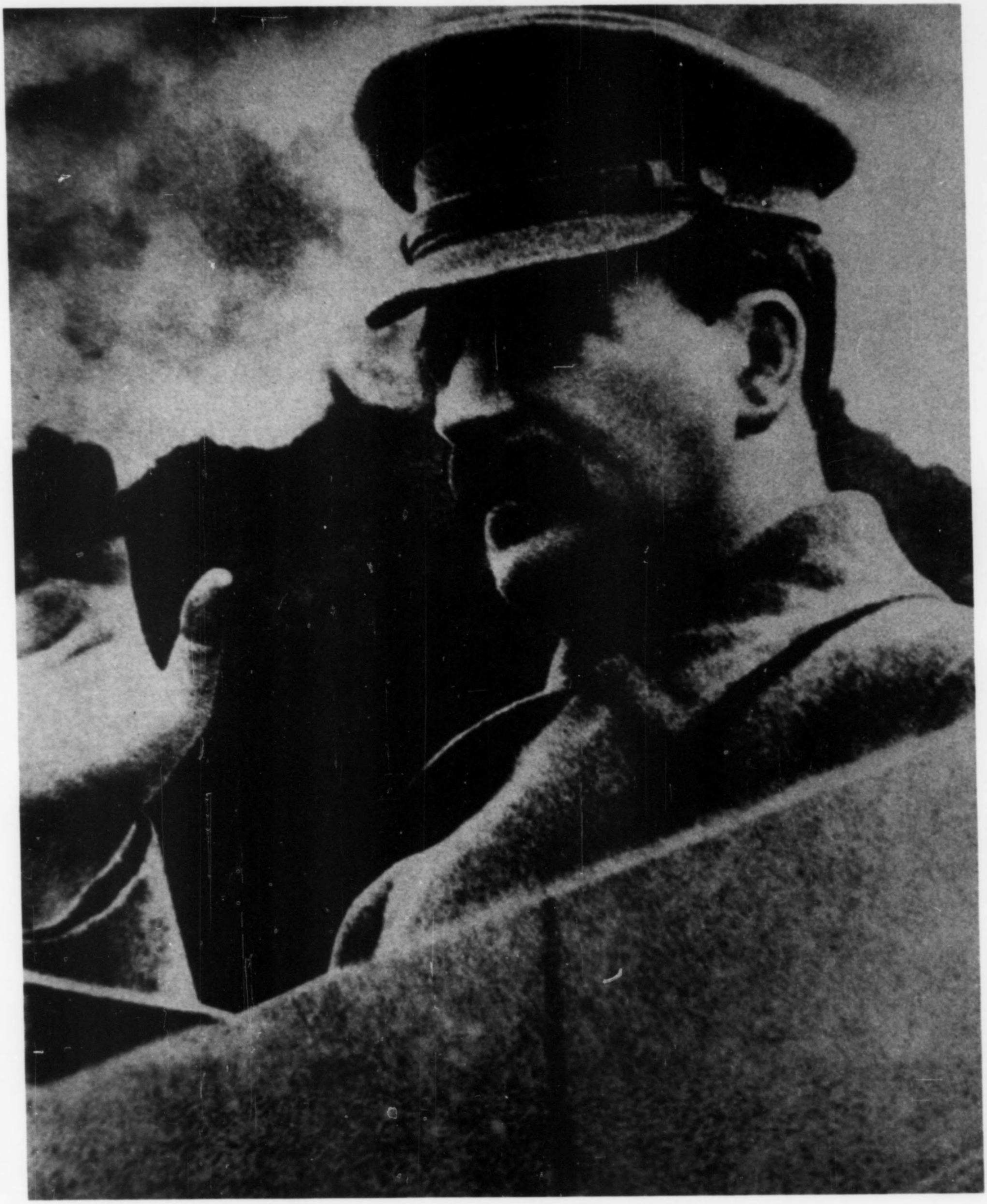
21. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in James Strachey, trans. and ed., *The Complete Psychological Works*, Standard Edition, vol. XIV, p. 243–258.
22. See Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" and "Criminal Tendencies in Normal Children," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, New York, Delacorte Press, 1975, pp. 344–369 and 170–186.

97. The "Chelyuskin" heroes have returned.
98. (revolving speech repeated)
99. Lenin, We go FORWARD!
100. THE END.[23]

It is by the conjunction of theoretical text and intertitles that I want to signal the precise signifying function of this film, the process of historicization which transforms document into monument. The function of the monumental is not only to commemorate, but definitively to inter and block the return of the dead (the stone set over the grave to impede the corpse's resurrection). *Three Songs of Lenin*, that commissioned film warmly received within the Soviet Union, is designed both to mark and to terminate a process; it is designed to accomplish the work of mourning for the Lost Leader, elevating him to the sublime inane (the appearance of Lenin, frequently enhaloed in soft focus, and in superimposition, establishes him in a space of transcendental irrationality). Further, Vertov's deployment of the cinematic anomalies, of the optical panoply of slow motion, stretch printing, looping, freeze-frame, reverse motion, originally constituted as an arsenal in the assault upon the conditions and ideology of cinematic representation (in that progress from the magical to the epistemological function), are now deployed as an admittedly powerful instrument in the working through, in the obsessive rehearsal of the past, in that labor of repetition, deceleration, distension, arrest, release, and fixation which characterize the work of mourning; in the infinitely varied and deeply cathected image of the Founder and Liberator, the dead Father. And it is, moreover, in the film's instants of the freezing of the frame—that of Lenin and of the hurtling advance of the "train of history"—that we feel, within the cinematic figuration of this work, the release of Lenin into the frozen atemporality of the still photograph, which figures the acknowledgment of the loved object as dead, and therefore, as Christian Metz has put it, "one who can be loved as dead."[24]

This marking of the mourning period and its closure, this translation of Lenin into the sublime inane defines, in fact, the space in which The Beckoning Substitute is now installed—enthroned—as Successor. It is as though Vertov, in fulfilling his assignment (an anniversary film), has seized upon the occasion for the national rehearsal of the work of mourning in the resolution, the transcending of a depressive position, nationally conceived, for the recall, in narcissistic triumph, to the impending task, the present imperative: the construction, under the Party Leader and Secretary-General, of an industrial power and a military machine.

23. The full list of intertitles appears beginning on page 40.
24. Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October*, no. 34 (Fall 1985), p. 83.



Joseph Stalin at the Moscow-Volga Canal. 1937.

Intertitles to *Three Songs of Lenin*, 1934

Lenin in his sarcophagus. 1930. All subsequent intertitle illustrations are from Three Songs of Lenin. *1934.*

Scenario: Dziga Vertov
Direction: Dziga Vertov
Photography: Surensky, Mark Magidson,
Bentsion Monastirsky
Music: Yuri Shaporin
Production: Mezhrabpomfilm 1 Nov.
American Distribution: Artkino

1. In Asia, in Europe and America, in African jungles and beyond the Arctic Circle, songs of Lenin are sung.

2. Who writes these songs? No one knows. They pass magically from hut to hut, from village to village . . .

3. This film is based on songs from the Soviet Orient.

4. They are songs of enslaved women who have cast off their veils; of illiterate peasants who have learned to read and write; songs of the electric lamp that has come to the dark village and of the water that has come to the desert . . .

5. Songs of the October Revolution; songs of the liberator, LENIN.

6. Songs of the war for a new, happy world; songs of the liberator—

7. I L Y I C H L E N I N

8. Here in Gorki village, Lenin died.

9. Here is the familiar bench upon which he sat.

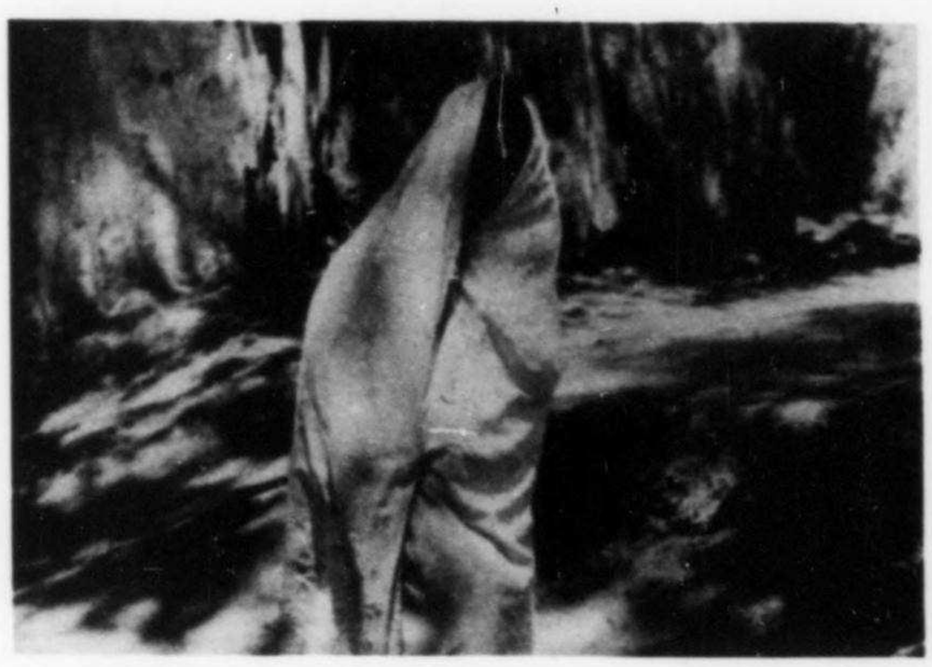
10. F I R S T S O N G (hand-lettered) "Under a Black Veil My Face . . ."

11. "—In a black prison, my soul . . ."

12. "—My life was blind . . ."

13. "—In darkness they held me—"

14. "—Till at dawn they set me free. The dawn of Lenin's Truth . . ."



15. "—We never beheld him . . ."

16. "—We never heard his voice . . ."

17. "—But dearly we loved him—like a father, more than a father . . ."

18. "—No father did more for his children than Lenin did for us . . ."

19. "This is my farm!"

20. "This is my collective farm!"

21. "My earth!"

22. "My work—my freedom."

23. "Pride, pride he gave me . . ."

24. "Freedom and pride and May Day . . ."

25. "—He found a desert and made a garden,
Out of death he made life . . ."

26. "Whose University? Mine . . ."

27. "Whose factory? Mine . . ."

28. "—I work with brothers and sisters . . ."

29. "Pride, pride he gave me . . ."

30. "The field is mine . . ."

31. "Lenin showed us our strength! A thousand rivers can make a sea. A million slaves can make a world."

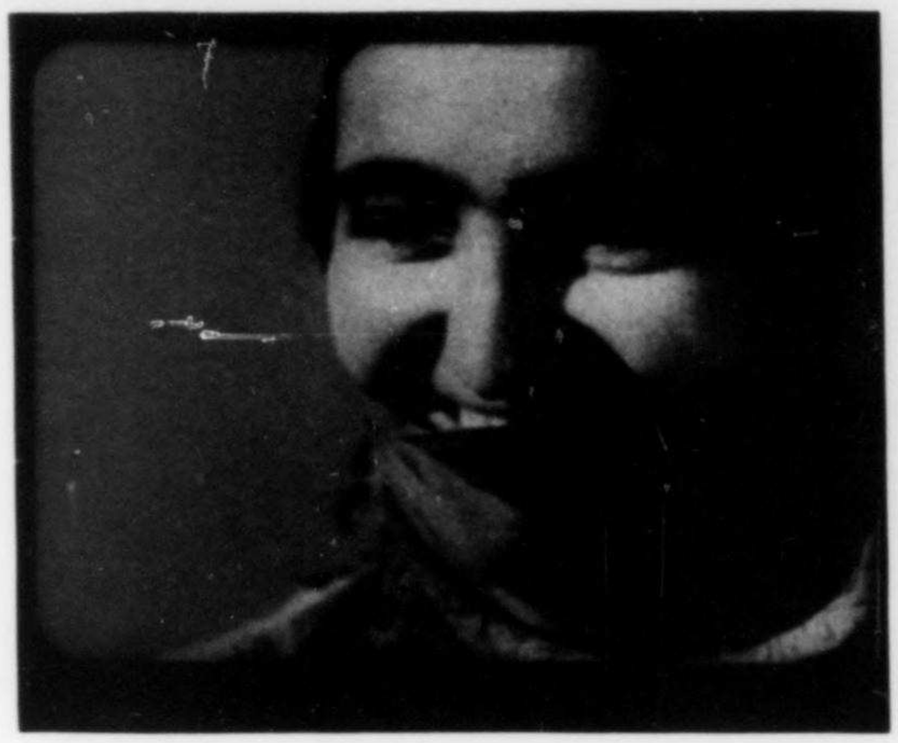
32. "I have found a new family."

33. "Hands, hands for my brothers . . ."

34. "Steel hands help us, too . . ."

35. "—Lenin was our teacher . . ."

36. "—He gave us all—his heart and brain . . ."



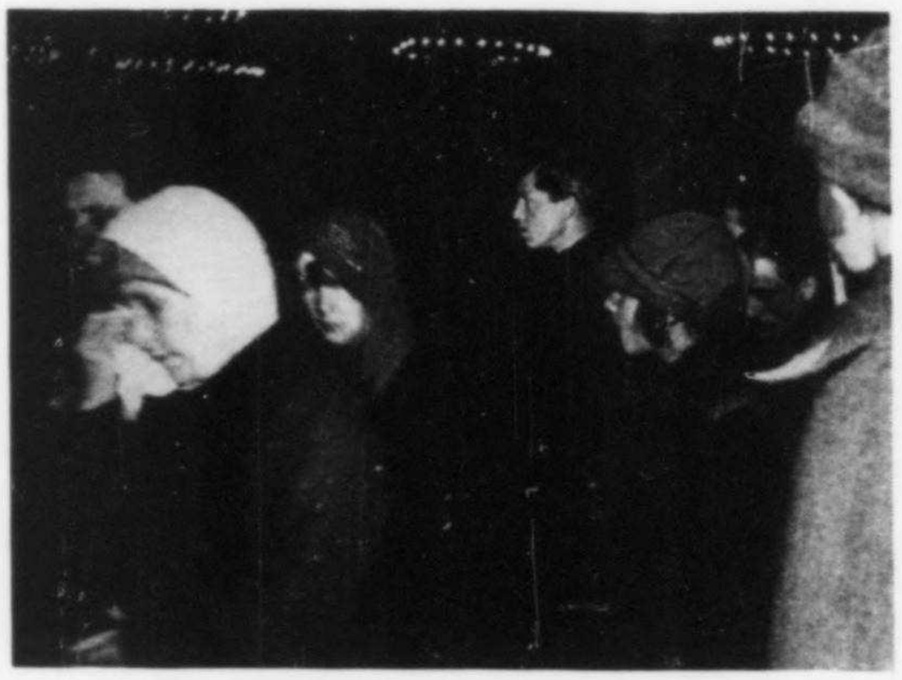
37. S E C O N D S O N G (hand-lettered)

38. "We loved him as we love our steppes,
No—more than our wagons and steppes. Lenin,
Lenin, we would die for you!"

39. But Lenin, the father, died, and his people mourned.

40. Lenin, the leader, is dead.

41. Lenin, the leader, lives. He lives in the heart of his people.



42. He worked for them untiringly.

43. They remember the bright spark in his eyes.

44. They remember his comradely smile.

45. They remember his impassioned, inspiring speeches.

46. Founder of the Soviet Union.

47. Father of the poor and oppressed.

48. The beloved leader of the proletariat.

49. The beacon of the oppressed East.

50. Lenin's great heart never failed them.

51. He deeply loved the people.

52. The people loved Lenin, called familiarly Ilyich.

53. Here is where he lived while outlawed under Kerensky.

54. He returned to lead his people in battle.

55. For bread and freedom—

56. THEY FIGHT!—

57. through cold.—

58. THEY FIGHT!—

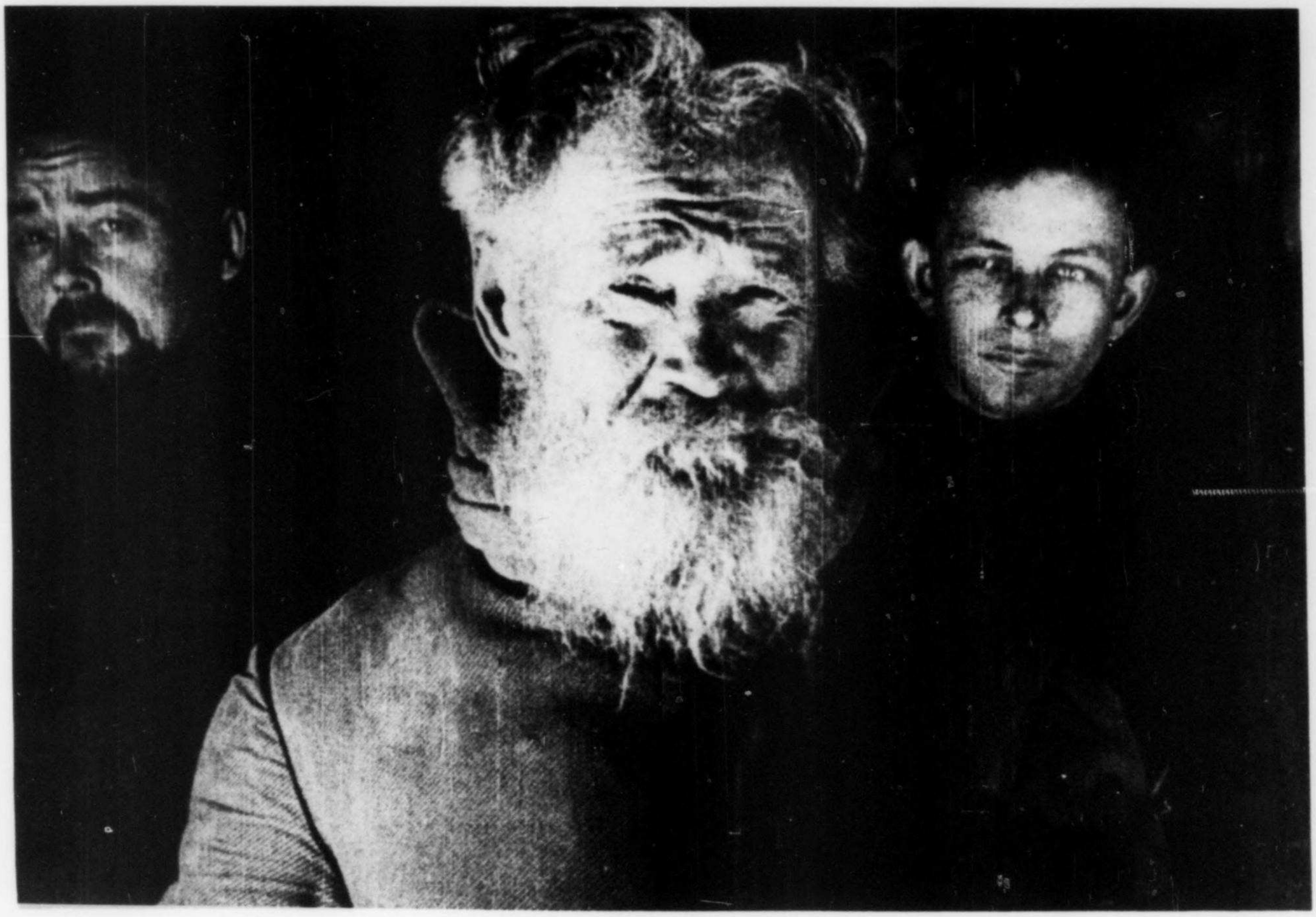
59. through hunger.—

60. THEY FIGHT!—

61. through fire and death.—

62. THEY GO!—

63. ILYICH LENIN led them . . .



64. TO VICTORY!

65. (Revolving title) Stand fast, stand together. Bravely *forward* against the enemy. Victory will be ours. The power of the landowners and profiteers in Russia will be overthrown.

66. LENIN—

67. does not move.

68. LENIN—

69. is silent.

70. "How many times here in the Red Square—

71. —did we hear him speak?"

72. T H I R D S O N G (hand-lettered)

73. "In Moscow . . ."

74. "Ah, in the great city of stone . . ."

75. "On the square stands a 'tent' . . ."

76. "The 'tent' where Lenin lies . . ."

77. "Go in your grief to that 'tent' . . ."

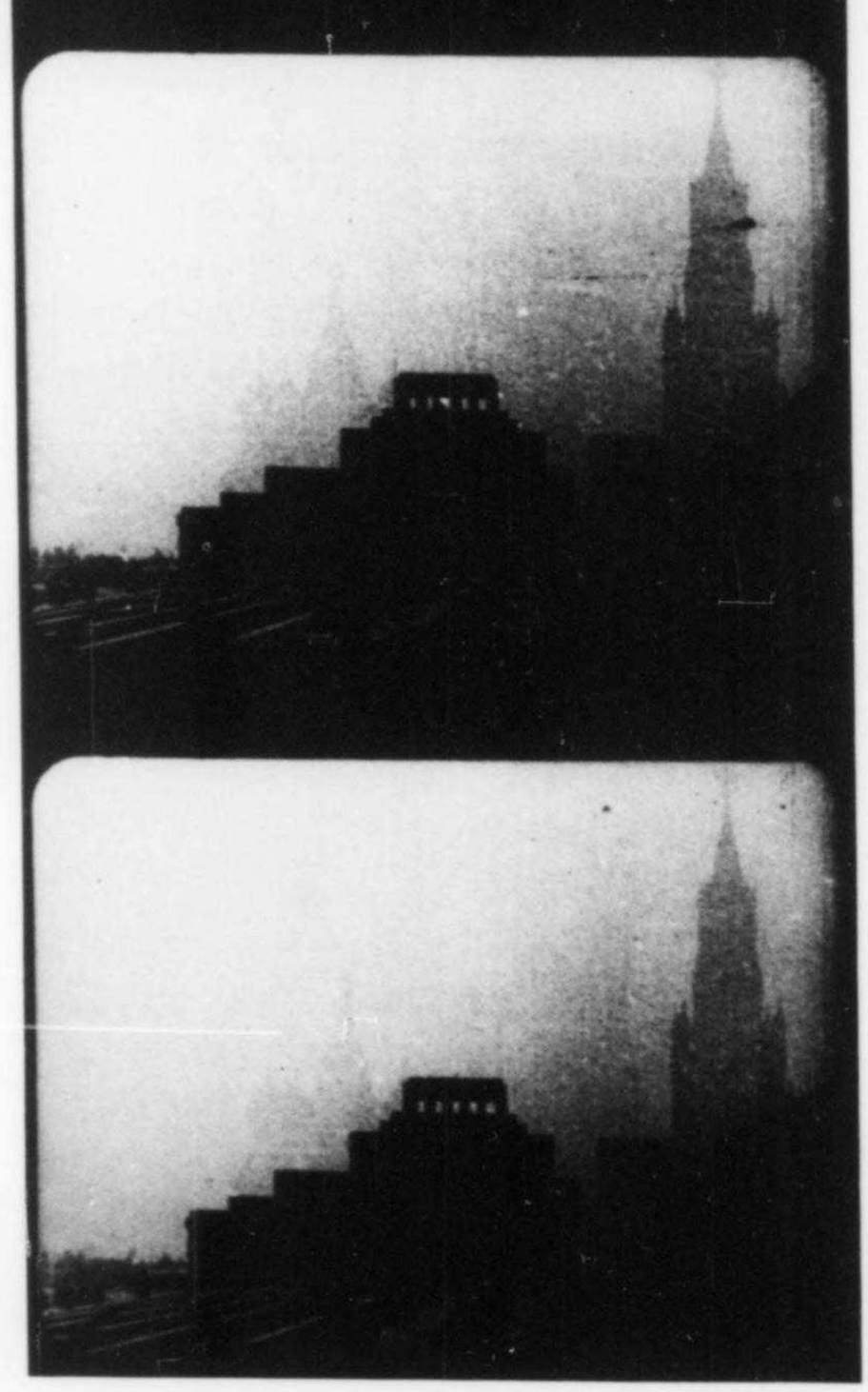
78. "Look at Lenin . . . and . . ."

79. "Your sorrow will dissolve as in water . . ."

80. "Your sorrow will scatter like leaves . . ."

81. "Lenin can dissolve your grief . . ."

82. "Lenin can give you courage . . ."



83. Stalin, great pupil of the great Lenin, carries on the fight . . .

84. To build a Socialist land of mass-luxury . . .

85. Machinery is now the weapon . . .

86. DNIEPROSTROY

87. The world's largest hydro-electric dam . . .

88. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"

89. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"

90. "OUR OIL!"

91. "OUR COAL!"

92. "OUR METAL!"

93. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"

94. "OUR MAGNITOGORSK . . ."

95. "Our mighty Baltic-White Sea Canal . . ."

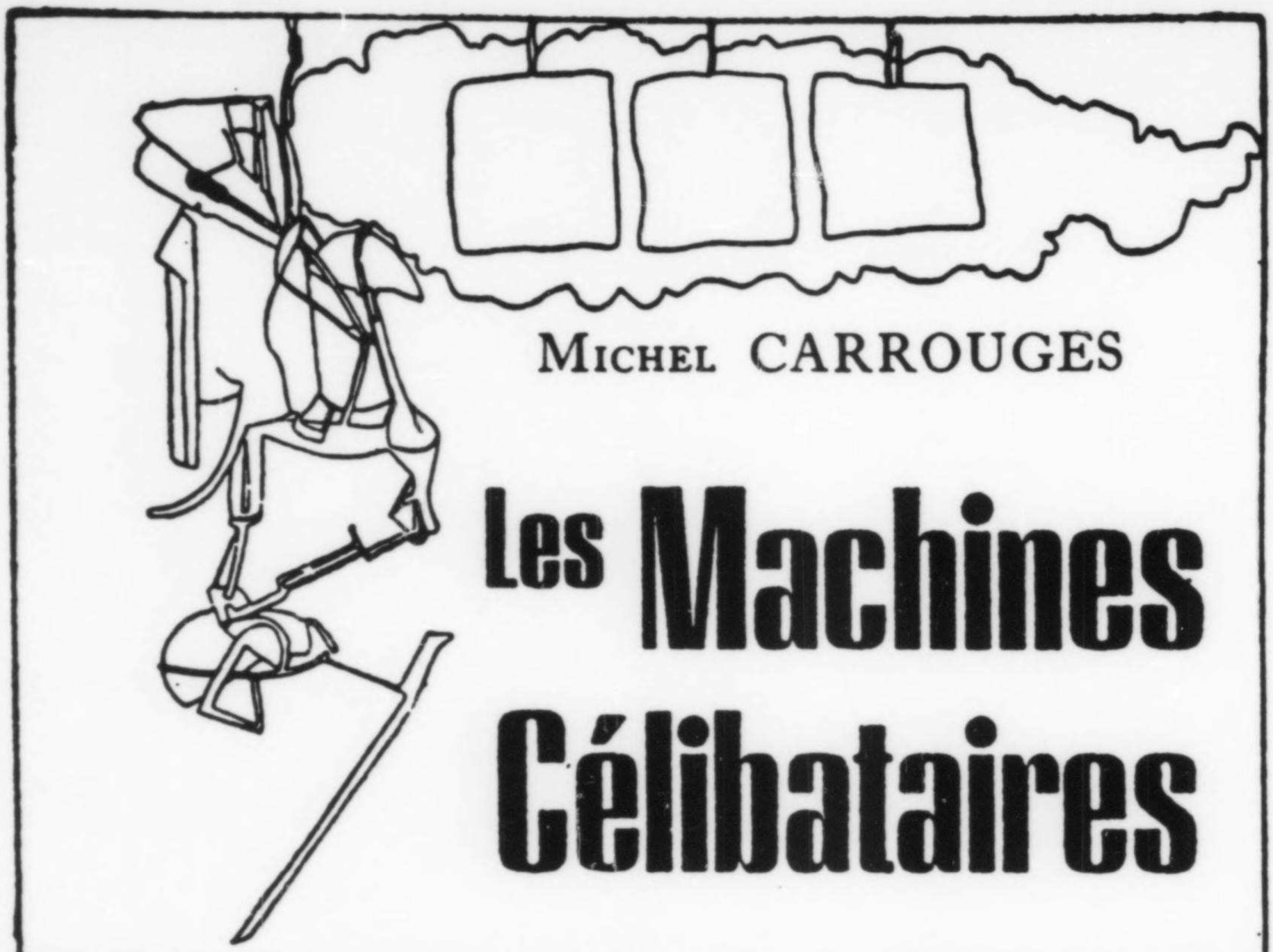
96. "If only Lenin could see our country now!"

97. The "Chelyuskin" heroes have returned.

98. (revolving speech repeated)

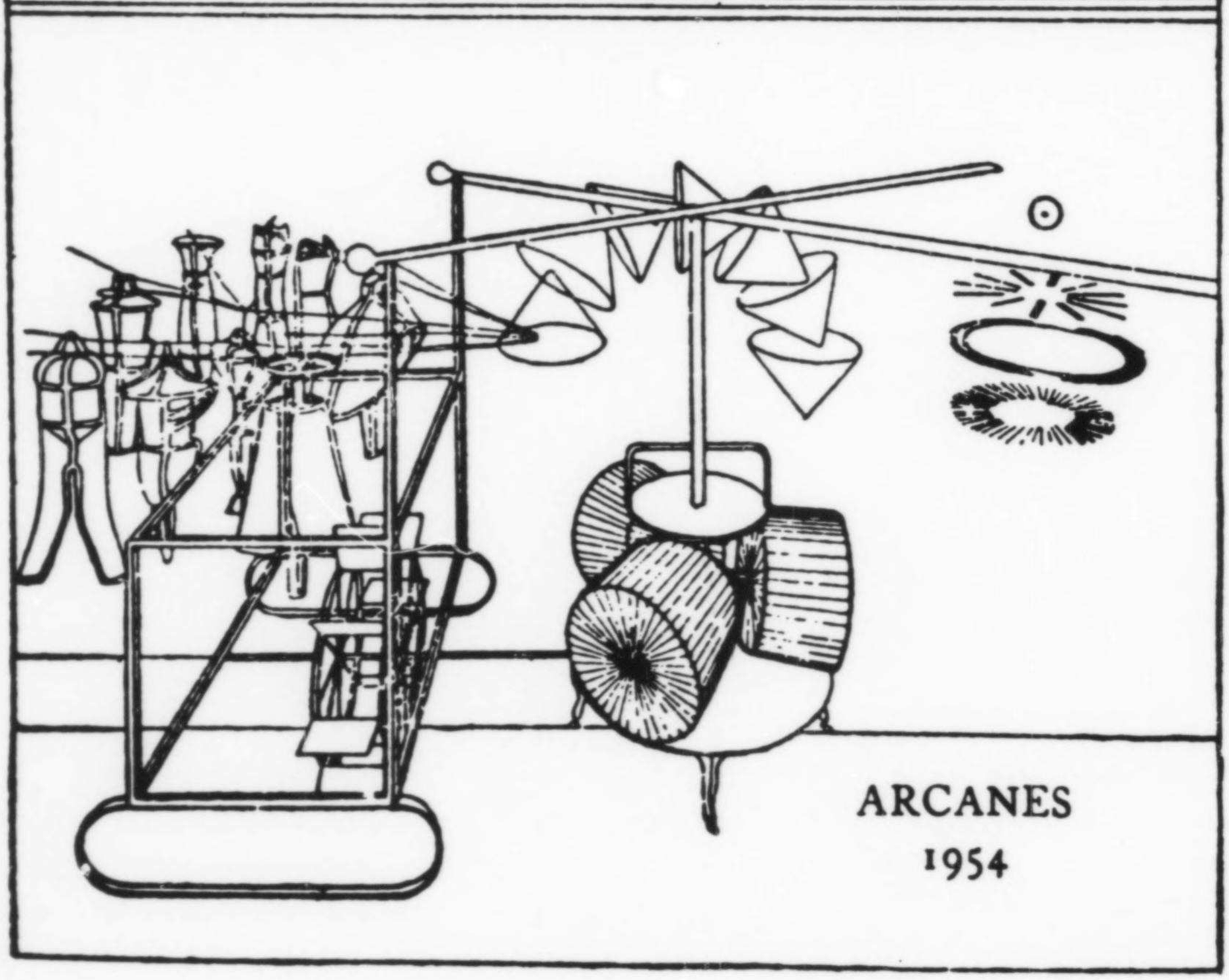
99. Lenin, We go FORWARD!

100. THE END.



MICHEL CARROUGES

Les Machines Célibataires



ARCANES

1954

Bachelors*

ROSALIND KRAUSS

> *The unpleasant thing, and one that nags at my modesty, is that at root* every name in history is I.
>
> —Deleuze and Guattari, quoting Nietzsche

"I always wanted," she said, "to find a way to make sculpture. . . . What I wanted was to be able to make a sculpture." And what had he said, a quarter of a century ago now? "I wanted to make a railroad car," he wrote from Voltri, in 1962. "Given enough time I could have made a train." David Smith, however, was already a sculptor; the "way" he wanted to find was not on the order of how to make the object, but how to make its phallic import absolutely unmistakable, even to himself.

So these two desires—to make a sculpture, to make a train—are different desires, we might say; they are the effects of different orders of fantasy.

But why, you could ask, would Sherrie Levine need to "find a way" to make a sculpture? Isn't the strategy of the readymade (her adoptive strategy, after all) itself, in fact, already, a way of making sculpture? The series of things it produces—the snow shovel, the bottle rack, the urinal, the comb—are already part of the order of the freestanding object; even his calendar (*Pharmacy*) and the advertisement he "corrected" (*Apollinaire Enameled*) enter the world of the readymade as *objects* rather than images. And so her grids, painted on lead, are likewise displaced from the domain of the image. Through the strategy of the readymade they are reinvented as chessboards, as checkerboards, as objects. If she called her early, pirated photographs "collages," it is because the image, scissored out of the pages of an art book, acquires along with its status as a readymade, the reified condition of the object.

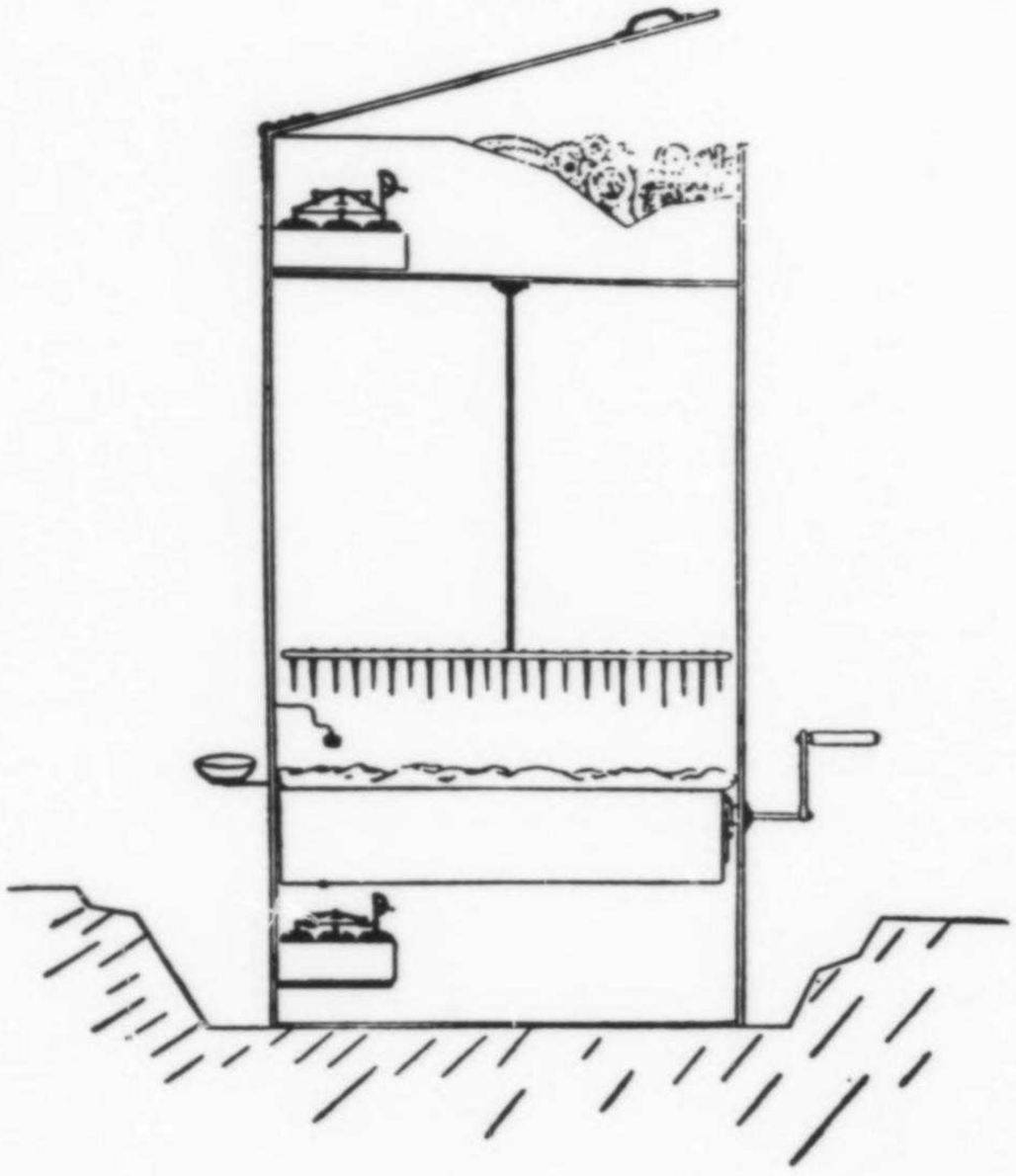
But the difference between the (readymade) object and the sculpture may

* This essay was written for the Sherrie Levine exhibition at the Mary Boone Gallery in September, 1989.

be this: that the sculpture makes it absolutely unmistakable, even to us, that the world of things to which it belongs is that of the "part-object." It has not come from off the shelf, of supermarket, or department store, or bookshop. There is no question but that it has migrated off the body: so many detachable organs, so many areas of intensity, the effects of so many proper names. The series: Rodin, Maillol, Duchamp, Brancusi, and closer to us, Morris, Andre, Hesse. So many names to which to attach the effect of a desire for the part-object: breast, penis, eye, hand, anus. The Rodin effect we could call it, the Brancusi effect, the Duchamp effect.

It was in 1952 that Michel Carrouges isolated the Duchamp effect. He called it "the bachelor machine," and he linked it to another series of names: Franz Kafka's mechanism for torture through tattooing, in *The Penal Colony*; Villier de l'Isle, Adam's irresistible automaton, in *The Eve of the Future*; Raymond Roussel's machines for textual production, in *Impressions of Africa*.[1] The model of the machine was clearest, most complete, however, in Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. Everything was there: the plan for perpetual

1. Michel Carrouges, *Les machines célibataires*, Paris, Arcanes, 1954.



Torture machine as described in Franz Kafka's The Penal Colony. *1914.*

motion which the "Litanies" chanted as "vicious circle"; the complexity of the interconnections (glider, malic molds, sieves, chocolate grinder, scissors . . .); the sterility of the cycle, its autoeroticism, its narcissism; the utter self-enclosure of the system, in which desire is at one and the same time producer, consumer, and reproducer (recorder or copier), which is to say, the bachelor apparatus, the oculist witnesses, the top inscription of the bride.

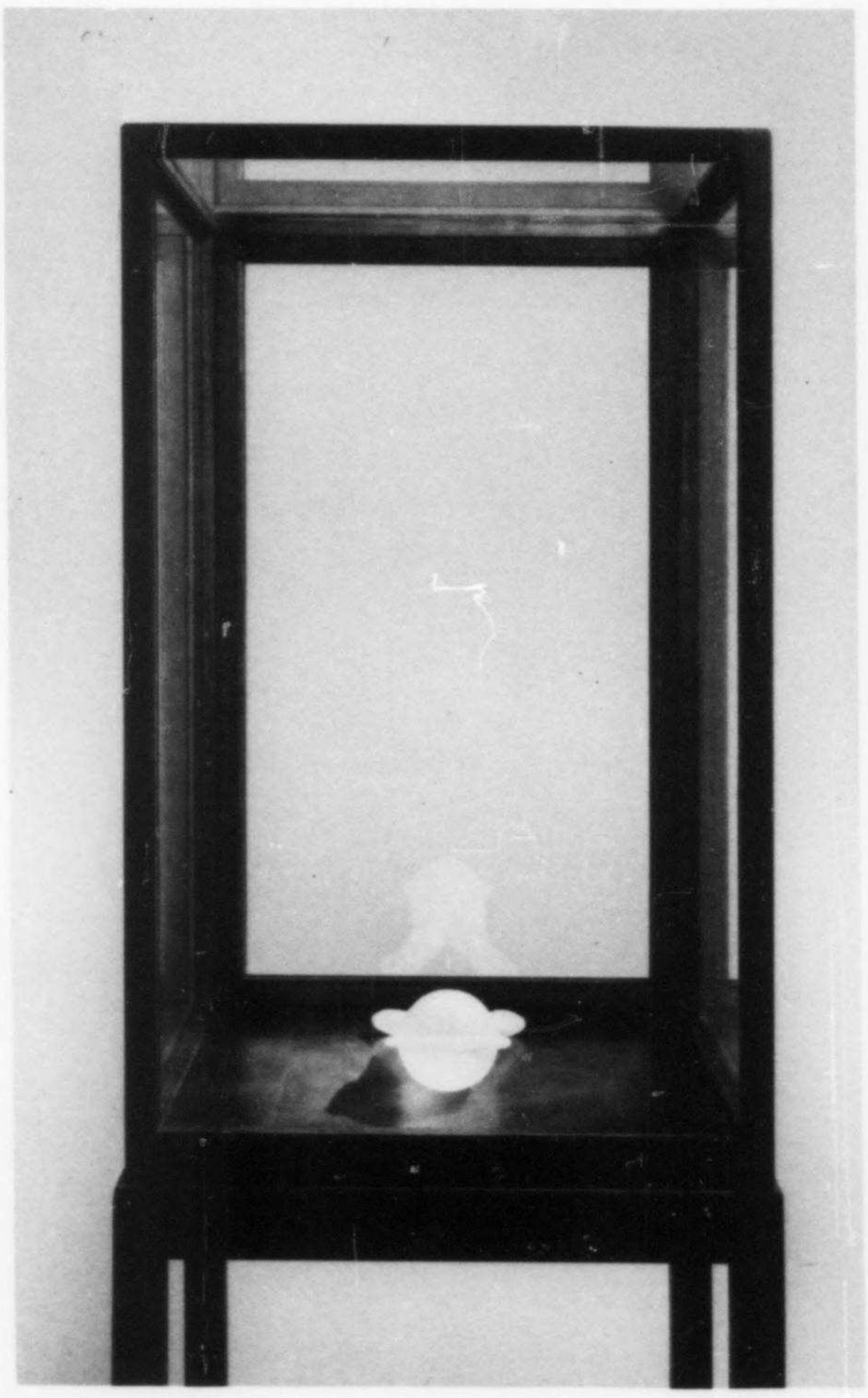
In 1972 the bachelor machine was there, waiting, for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to hook it up to the body without organs, to plug it into the logic of the desiring-machines, to reinvent the Duchamp effect within the world of schizo-capitalism.[2] The total interconnectedness of the machines and the absolute deterritorialization of the world onto which they cling: an undifferentiated *socius*, the body without organs, the subject without a center, the world without Oedipus.

The bachelor machine of *Anti-Oedipus* constructs the relationship between the desiring-machines and the body without organs, between the bachelor's world of production and the bride's domain of inscription. The desiring-machines produce by intercepting the continuous flows of milk, urine, semen, shit; they interrupt one flow in order to produce another, which the next machine will interrupt to produce a flow for the next, and so on. Each machine is a part-object: the breast-machine, the mouth-machine, the stomach-machine, the intestine-machine, the anus-machine. As opposed to this the body without organs produces nothing; it re-produces. It is the domain of simulation, of series crossing one another, of the possible occupation of every place in the series by a subject forever decentered. "I am Prado, I am also Prado's father. I venture to say that I am also Lesseps. . . . I wanted to give my Parisians, whom I love, a new idea—that of a decent criminal. I am also Chambige—also a decent criminal. . . . The unpleasant thing, and one that nags at my modesty, is that at root *every name in history is I*."[3] The body without organs is the place of inscription; it is textual, semiological. But its logic is not that of the signifier, that of representation. Rather it is the logic of flows of information in which the content of the first flow (its product) is the expressive medium of the second (its producer). Deleuze and Gauttari quote McLuhan here: "The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the content of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph."[4]

2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
3. Friedrich Nietzsche letter to Jakob Burckhardt, January 5, 1889, as cited in *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 86.
4. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 23, as cited in *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 241.

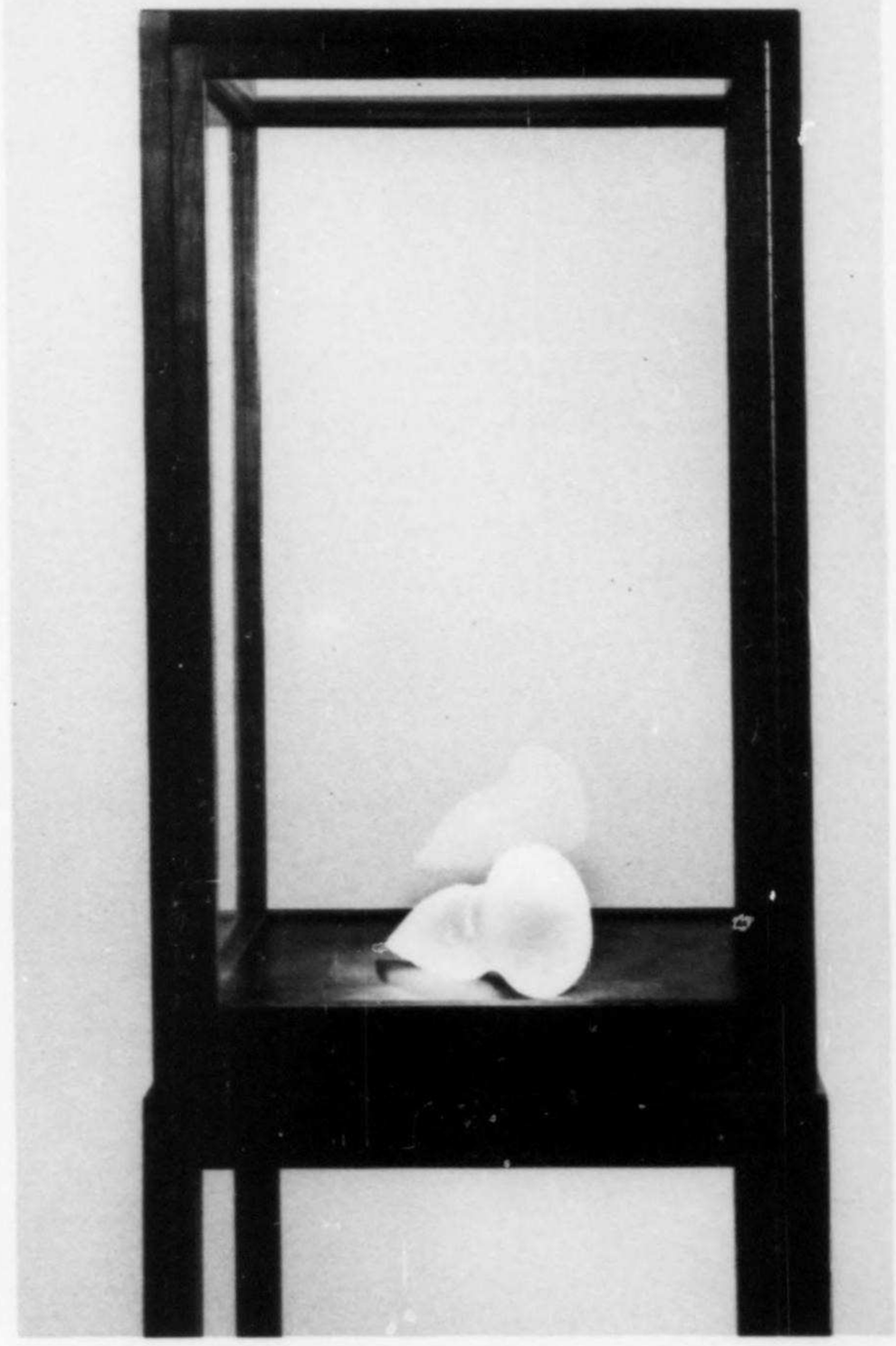
The same logic is at work, then, within the world of production—the desiring-machines—and that of consumption and reproduction—the body without organs. That is the achievement of the bachelor machine; it holds up the mirror in which the blossoming of the bride reflects onto the cemetery of the uniforms and liveries, in which the inscription is the same as the production, a place where the erotic energy of the "shots" is locked forever in a "mirrorical return." The bachelor machine produces this folding of the one over the other as a moment of pure intensity.

In 1989 the bachelor machine was there, waiting, to provide Sherrie Levine with "a way" to make sculpture. The Duchamp effect she needed was not that of the readymade, which describes the relations among commodities, and between commodities and their consumers, but that of the bachelor-machine, which invokes the connections between part-objects. And the malic molds, otherwise called the cemetery of uniforms and liveries, would provide these part-objects



"readymade." The "way to make a sculpture" would be to exhume them, to liberate them from the plane of *The Large Glass*, to cast them in three dimensions. By freeing them from their connection in the series: sieves-malic molds-capillary tubes-glider-chocolate grinder . . . , they would be liberated ever more securely into the other series: Rodin-Maillol-Brancusi-Duchamp-Hesse . . . , the series that includes David Smith most clearly when he dreams of wanting to make a train.

And nothing needs to be added to these bachelors. They are just as Duchamp left them, readymade. Not as he made them, for on the field of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* they are in the two dimensions of sheets of lead; but as he projected them, within the notes he so patiently stored in *The Green Box*. For he envisioned them as molds after all, and therefore to be cast. Each cast producing a bachelor, or as he would also put it, a malic form. And the contents of the molds he described as well, when he imagined the illuminating



gas inside the molds as solidifying into frosty spangles—"a thousand spangles of frosty gas." To cast the bachelors in glass, and then to frost the glass, is therefore to add nothing, to create nothing. It is to accept Duchamp's bachelors, his malic forms, readymade. It is to do nothing more than to occupy that historical position that can be called the Duchamp effect.

The only thing here that is added to the Duchamp effect is what is subtracted, namely, the effect of cutting away the bachelors from the rest of the apparatus, from the glider, the sieves, the grinder, the scissors, the splashes . . . , and finally of separating each bachelor from his fellows. The isolation is what is added. It is, we could say, an added subtraction. So that the question is how to characterize this excision that the artist's own desiring-machine produces within the connected flow of Duchamp's apparatus, of Duchamp's glass.

One answer is that the added subtraction equals "lack." Desire, according to this, desires what is absent. It wants to have the missing thing. And that thing that is missing will, by giving lack its name, also give desire its meaning. In this reading the sculpture occupies the level of a fantasy. It stays within the world of representation as the model of something desired. Its lack is castrative; its meaning is redemptive, meaning redeemed. It is sculpture as the desire for meaning.

But another answer is that the added subtraction allows the bachelor, now cast in glass, actually to be produced, and thus to be added to the domain of reality. The bachelor does not mark the place of lack but rather the site of production. And within this production it forms a series, for it is produced in multiple. It creates a flow of little glass replicas, the continuum of the series which the machine now slices apart, making one little thing after the other. And, actualized within this production, it enters the whole array of other, similar, series:

1) The art-historical series: lying recumbent, like the gleaming bronze eggs of Brancusi, it attaches itself to them, as so many infantile moments of contentment, so many breasts, mouths, bellies.

2) The aesthetic series: sheltering within its little, glass vitrine, it is like the fragments of antiquity displayed in a museum—so many torsos, legs, arms, shoulders. Which means its glass case becomes a museum-machine, interrupting the flow of the antique *Kunstindustrie*—the fifth-, fourth-, third-century circulation of multiples within the classical decorative-arts production—isolating and creating the neoclassical fragment, the aestheticized form of modernist sculpture as a desire for the part-object.

3) The formal series: a series within a series, it is the glass container inside the glass container of its case, reproducing itself in ever smaller miniaturizations, glass as the form of transparency, as form *en abîme*.

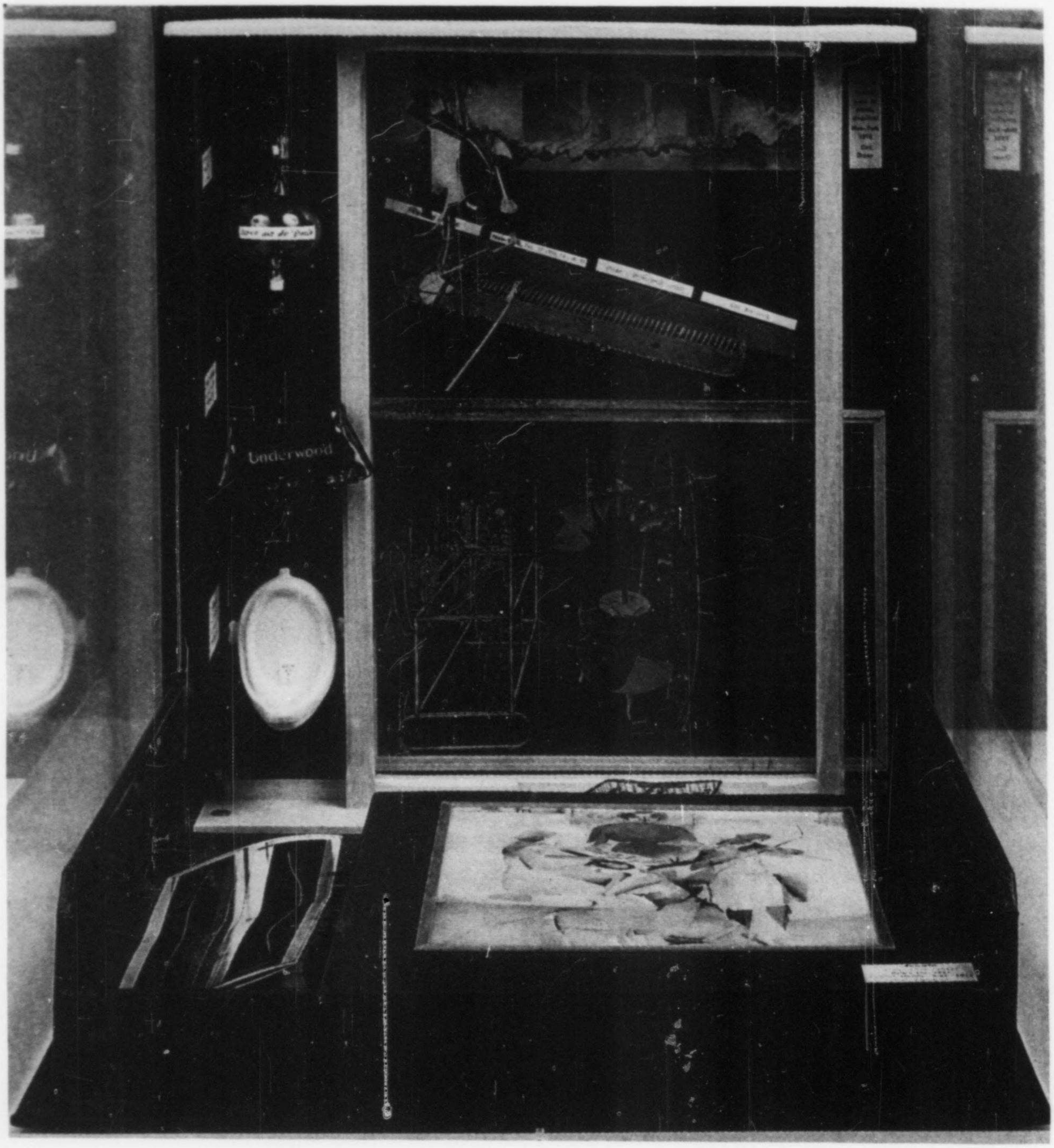
4) The commodity series: "The question of shop windows∴," Duchamp had written, "The exigency of the shop window∴/The shop window proof of the existence of the outside world. . . . " Desiring production and economic

production are not metaphors for one another, *Anti-Oedipus* insists; their relation is not that of representation. Their connection is real.

It is the very isolation of Levine's *Bachelor* that allows us to plot the array of its possible connections, to see it not only as the little phallic part-object, the desiring-machine, but also as the slippery, undifferentiated surface of the closed form, *Anti-Oedipus*'s body without organs, the locus of desire as an endless play of substitutions. And it is onto this deterritorialized body that the Levine effect can be plotted, produced.

The little Joey of Bruno Bettelheim's *Empty Fortress* announces his own occupation within the labyrinth of the bachelor machine. "Connecticut, Connect-I-cut," he cries. All of his life functions, Joey claims, will only work if he is plugged into machines that will, with their motors whirring and their lights blinking, allow him to breathe, to eat, to defecate. "Connect-I-cut" is Joey's rare instance of the first person, of "I." Mostly he is a third person, a function of the machine. He is an effect of the machines, rather than a subject. The Joey effect.

To release desire into a world without a subject, a world in which proper names form a series among themselves, a world in which the name claims nothing, "means" nothing, even though it continues to produce: this is a description of the Levine effect.



Marcel Duchamp, Box in a Valise. *1941. (Photo: Alex Brunelle.)*

Marcel Duchamp, or The *Phynancier* of Modern Life

THIERRY DE DUVE

TRANSLATED BY ROSALIND KRAUSS

In the whole of the twentieth century there is no less utopian an artist than Marcel Duchamp. And in the whole of it there is no one—with the exception of Matisse, whom Duchamp greatly admired—who could have cared less. Never did Duchamp believe that art had it in its power to promise a better, juster, or happier society, and never did he have to regret that art had reneged on its promises. Long before Yves Klein began selling wind, Duchamp cruelly projected the idea of "establish[ing] a society in which the individual has to pay for the air he breathes," something that didn't prevent him from quietly, tongue-in-cheek, continuing to go through life, breathing. Long before Andy Warhol went shopping and stacked up fake boxes of Brillo, he bought a real bottle rack from a department store and simply waited for time to make it into art and for viewers to give it a price. Long before Joseph Beuys declared that "the silence of Marcel Duchamp is overrated," he stopped talking and let others put a value on his silence. He had understood that all the utopias of modernity had already been realized, and thus that they had never been utopias.

Beuys was right; it's true that everyone is a potential artist. But does that guarantee that "creativity" and "use-value" even exist?[1] No one knows; these are nothing but Ideas, postulates. Nothing says that everyone has a productive faculty within him- or herself, a faculty that is alienated at present but which defines or will define humanity in its generic essence. And nothing proves that it is, in principle, just that everyone be an artist and liberating that everyone will some day become one. Nothing says that humans must work in order to satisfy their needs and must graft their presently reified relations onto this species-determined horizon. And nothing proves that it is just and liberating that they do

1. This is the fourth section of a four-part study of Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Yves Klein, and Marcel Duchamp, titled *Cousus de fil d'or* (*Sewn with Golden Thread*), Villeurbanne, Art-Edition, 1990. *October* has published the first three parts: "Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians," no. 43 (Summer 1988); "Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected," no. 48 (Spring 1989); and "Yves Klein, or The Dead Dealer," no. 49 (Summer 1989).

so. Alienation and reification are wrongs to be righted only on the grounds of these postulates.

Warhol was also right; it is true that art is a business and the work of art a commodity. But does that mean that creativity and use-value don't exist and that one must cynically accept art's absorption into exchange-value? After all Warhol had his utopia as well: if all artists are machines and produce no exchange-value, then all consumers are potential art lovers. But that doesn't prove that they will consume well, and it doesn't promise that the tradition called art will survive its absorption by commodification. It only shows that Yves Klein was wrong and that it was unjust for the artist to claim to own the means of artistic production and to restrict artistic consumption to the buyer. One can cause and suffer wrongs without their supporting postulates being proved.

Nothing is proved, then, and it is as if Duchamp, skeptic, took off from these observations. It is as if he had, *in advance,* observed Yves Klein struggling with his wishful thinking and had understood that in fact "to be a painter," or rather to have been one, was the preliminary condition to "being an artist." This is what his own wishful thinking had taught him. And it is as if he had watched Warhol's success and had understood that the *spleen* of the commodity was the condition for any object whatever to be called art and that the disappearance of aesthetic value into exchange-value was the condition for such an object to have a price. It's what the success of his readymades had taught him. It is as if he had watched Beuys play the père Ubu of creativity and had understood that at the moment when the artist-proletarian saw himself brought home to a Bohemia as unreal as Jarry's Poland, the congruence of the aesthetic field with that of political economy had been perfect, complete, accomplished. *Etant donné* this lesson, only one question remained: how to make art out of *that*?

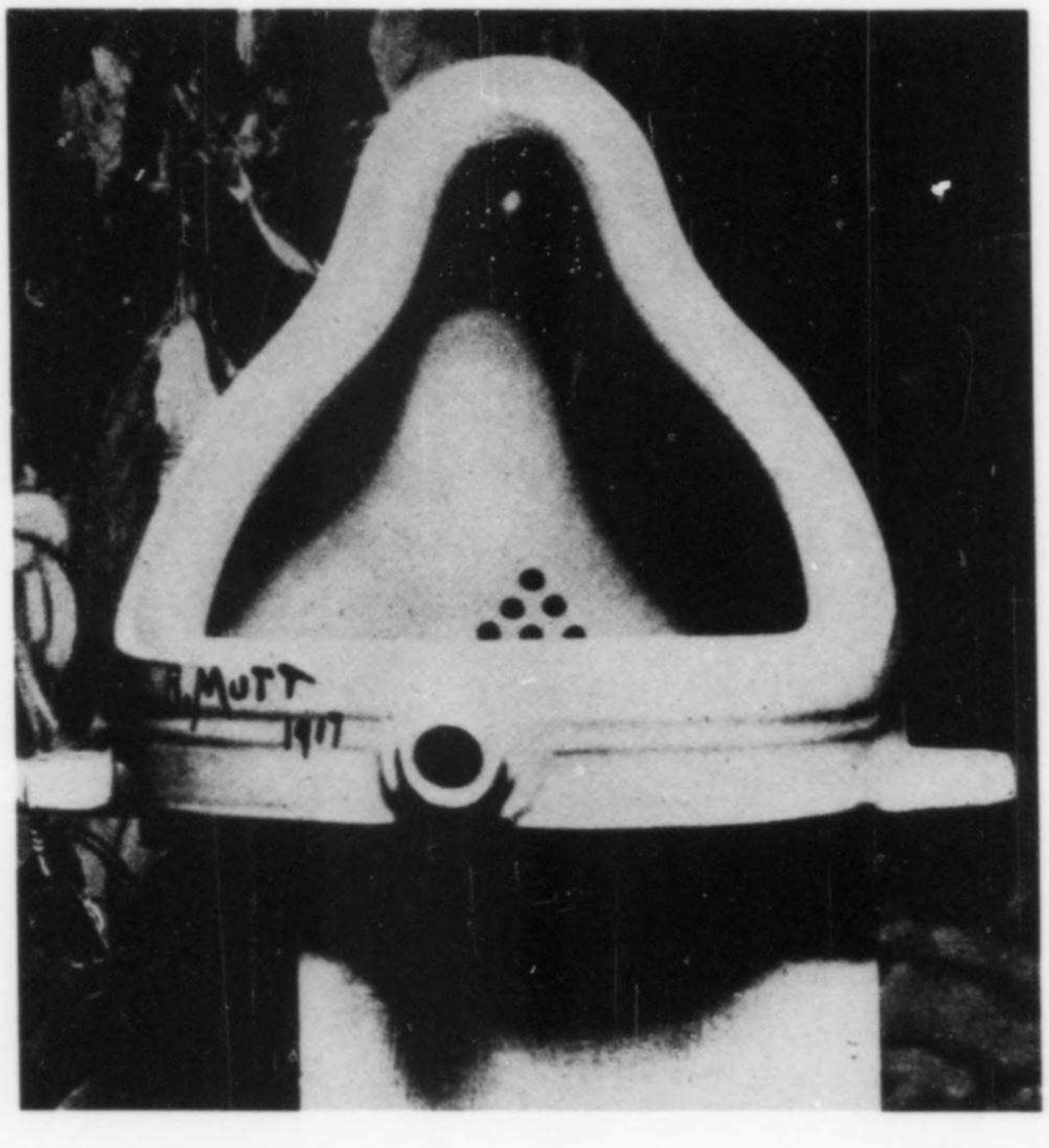
The reference to Jarry is anything but accidental, when we know with what grains of irony the *Salt Seller* (*marchand du sel*) seasoned the formula through which he "defined" art: *Arrhe est à art ce que merdre est à merde* (Arrhe is to art as shitte is to shit). There's nothing left to say, and it is not art but the very congruence of art with economy that the formula analyzes by means of "algebraic comparison." There are hundreds of ways to read that formula, one of which is: "arrhe,"[2] as Duchamp practices it, is to art as practiced by the modernists who believe in utopias what King Ubu's oath, *merdre* (which is also the first word of *Ubu roi*), is to the substance about which everyone knows that its retention constitutes the "anal-sadistic" personality of all the capitalist misers of the world. The grain of salt that would allow this substance to be taken for a secretion of an artist's creativity is gross indeed. But when everyone can be an artist for the simple reason of free access to the marketplace where what is reified

2. Translator's note: *les arrhes* (a plural noun), which means a deposit or down payment, is homophonic with *art* in French.

on the one hand is the very thing that is sublimated on the other, the odds are heavy that a large part of what gets traded there is in the nature of the substance in question. (Manzoni didn't miss the opportunity to remind the all too sublime Yves Klein of this.) And since on this market the artist is a proletarian who alienates his own labor power (Beuys's version) or a machine from which things come that, even though without value, have a price (Warhol's), why not kill two birds with one stone and make one's body into "a transformer designed to utilize the slight, wasted energies such as: . . . the fall of urine and excrement"? Provided the artist knows how to exploit the unexpected—and least prodigal—resources of his labor power, he will always find himself some businessman or other able to turn a profit from the few quanta of *wertbildende Substanz* nevertheless spent. Besides, it's better to take care of that oneself. Laziness is the best of foremen and the most fertile of inventors, and humor the most efficient of dealers. It's up to the worker or the machine to supply the *waterfall,* and up to the dealer to pay the bill for the *illuminating gas. Etant donné,* then, these two conditions—labor and commerce, the political-economic field—how to make *arrhe* out of that?

In New York, in April 1917, a so-called R. Mutt submits a urinal titled *Fountain* to the hanging committee (of which Duchamp was president) of the newly created Society of Independent Artists, Incorporated. The Society, whose motto was "no jury, no prizes," was open on principle to everyone: the membership card cost a dollar, the annual dues, five. For this modest sum, and on the additional condition of showing the year of his joining up, the little nobody became, in a certain sense, a stockholder of the Société Anonyme (the name would be used by Duchamp in 1920 for the collection he created with Katherine Dreier) from which, on the whole, all American artists exposed to the ostracism of the National Academy hoped to receive dividends. Behold, then, this little nobody who is simultaneously a small-time capitalist in an enterprise licensed to deal in art (the exhibited works were for sale) and an independent artisan otherwise invited to display his know-how. Marcel Duchamp shared this double status with the thousand or so self-proclaimed artists who participated in the 1917 exhibition, with the qualification that he played on one side as on the other an ascendant role. On the stockholders' side, he was one of the twenty founding members and president of the hanging committee to boot; on the artisans' side, he was recognized for his talent as a painter, being the creator of the highly celebrated *Nude Descending a Staircase.* Yet, giving up this double privilege and making like the little nobody, he submits his entry under a pseudonym. The urinal is refused. Duchamp keeps quiet, waits for the storm to pass, and at the close of the show publishes an unsigned editorial in his little satirical review, *The Blind Man,* an editorial called "The Richard Mutt Case," which, taking up the defense of Mr. Mutt, reveals his first name.

Duchamp didn't make the *Fountain* with his own hands, like an artisan; he bought it from its manufacturer, the J. L. Mott Iron Works. The name Mutt



Marcel Duchamp, Fountain. *1917.*
(Photo: Alfred Stieglitz.)

signals this provenance with little disguise. "And I added Richard," Duchamp said. "That's not a bad name for a *pissotière*. Get it? The opposite of poverty." He couldn't have been more explicit, as the signature acknowledges the double status of the nobody who proclaims himself an artist in becoming a member of the Society. On the one side there is the manufacturer, Mutt or Mott, who stands in for the artisan, and on the other Richard, the capitalist, the stockholder. It is as if the latter had placed an order with the former, or rather, as if Richard (alias Duchamp, president of the hanging committee), too lazy or too busy with lighting the entries of his co-stockholders with *illuminating gas,* had charged Mutt (alias Duchamp, author of *Nude Descending a Staircase*) with painting *The Waterfall*, and the latter, hardly less sluggish, had gone to supply himself at J. L. Mott's, whose advertisements ran: "Among our articles of lazy hardware we recommend a faucet which stops dripping when nobody is listening to it." Mott has the item in stock. Mutt hands over the deposit while promising to pay the rest as soon as possible, even adding, quite candidly, that he counts on reselling the object at a profit. "Well that's a peculiar use for a urinal," Mott mutters under his breath, "but it's none of my business. Mine is to sell things that help men do number one, but I sell for the sake of selling and not for them to relieve themselves." And the deal is struck. Whereupon Mutt goes away, his *Fountain* under his arm, and takes it to Richard and his hanging committee. Richard, just as lazy an administrator as

The J. L. Mott Iron Works, Porcelain-lipped urinal,* Panama *model. 1908.

Mutt is a painter, is absent. His assistants (George Bellows and Rockwell Kent) throw up their arms and exclaim: "The *Fountain* may be a very useful object in its place, but its place is not an art exhibition and it is, by no definition, a work of art." (That's the text of the press release published by the organizers the day after the opening.) The follow-up is very confused, and the versions of the facts vary. Here's one (certainly false, but accredited by Duchamp): another Richard comes along, a friend of the first (in fact his name was Walter C. Arensberg, art collector), and asks about the object of the scandal. Nobody can tell him anything. "I want to buy it," he says without even having seen it. They find the object behind a partition and Arensberg, big spender, hands over a blank check, saying, "Fill in the amount yourselves." Upon which, flanked by Duchamp and Man Ray, he leaves the room "holding the new acquisition as though it were a marble Aphrodite." Mutt goes back to Mott's and pays the balance. Richard resigns from the Society and never cashes his dividends. Arensberg loses the urinal (if he ever had it). And Duchamp has only to wait. He had his reply to the *speculation* he had jotted down as early as 1913: "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?" The answer was no, since speculation there certainly had been.

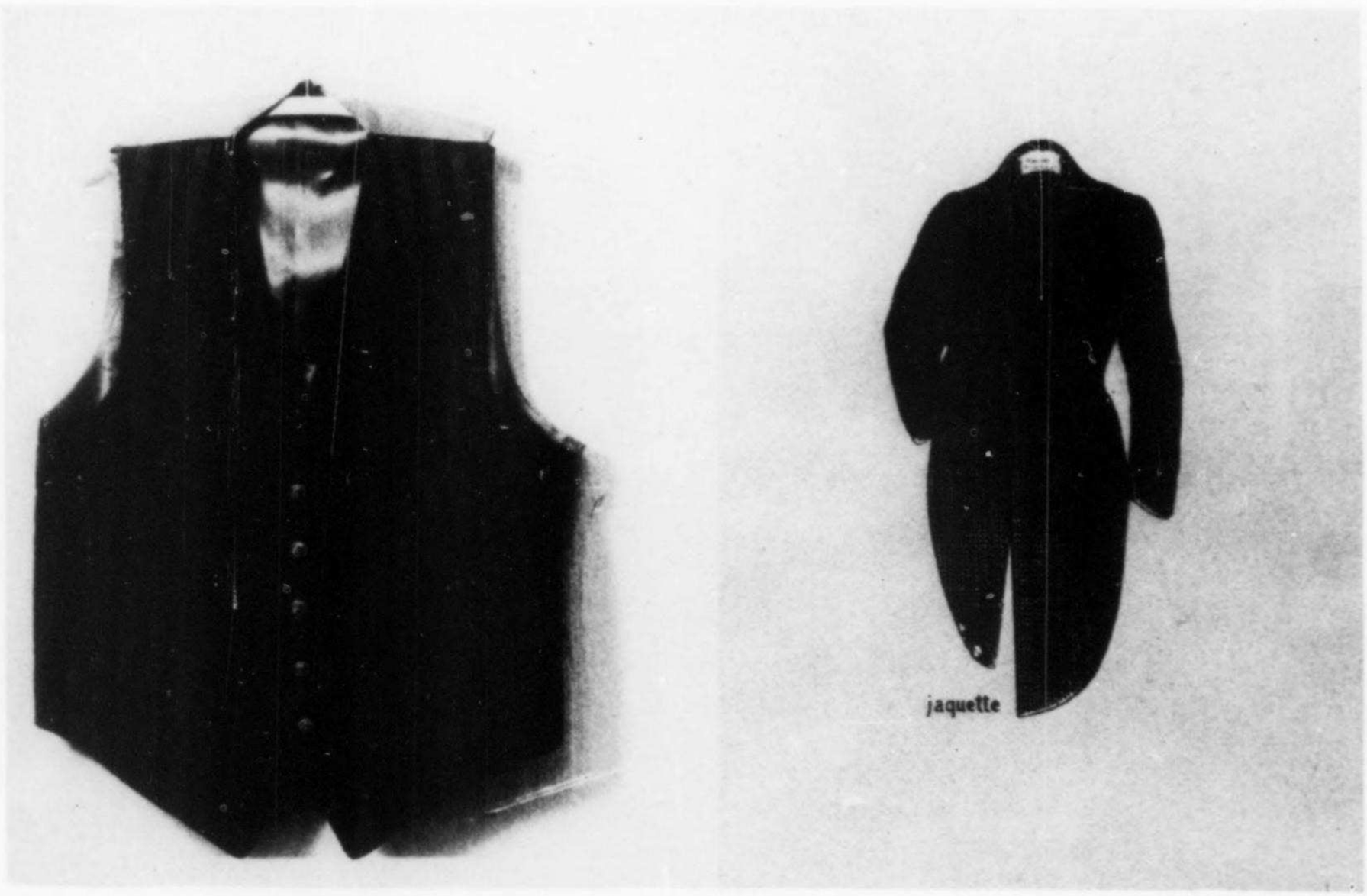
Taking it from the top: *arrhe* is to art what *shitte* is to shit. The art that Mutt practices in working as little as possible, but in making his down payment (*des arrhes*) to Mott, is to the art of those who work and believe in creativity what

speculation is to production, what *Phynance* (as Jarry spelled "finance" in *Ubu roi*) is to political economy. The word *arrhes,* which means deposit, or down payment, exists only in the plural. Duchamp writes it in the singular, adding: "grammatically, the *arrhe* of painting is feminine in gender." Here's how the word becomes triply specific, then: as a name for money it loses its character of general equivalency and signifies the singular advance on a singular payment; as the homophone for the word *art* it only refers to painting, specifically, and not to the arts in general; as a gendered word, it designates only half of mankind and shows it to be female. Now, "—one only has: for *female* the urinal and one *lives* by it.—" This is in *The 1914 Box,* three years before *Fountain*. *Virgin* and *Bride* are titles of paintings between which, in August 1912, Duchamp painted *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, and after which, in October, he gave up painting and found himself a job on the labor market as librarian "in order to get enough time to paint for myself." Now, of his strange activity as "arrhtist" who "paints for himself," who composes aleatory music and draws plans for his *Large Glass* but doesn't paint any longer, nothing or very little lands on the market between October 1912 and the 1917 Independents where ordinarily the specific work of an artisan-painter is exchanged for general currency. And when *Fountain* (feminine, just like *Virgin* and *Bride*) makes its appearance, there is no longer either painting or artisanship. Duchamp has made art, without its belonging to one of the arts, no more to music or to architecture than to painting; not even to sculpture. Moreover, he has done nothing at all; he has bought a readymade object whose manufacturer, J. L. Mott, didn't make either. Those who made the urinal neither made art nor tried to do so; they are the workers whose *creativity* Mott bought on the labor market.

The word "readymade" comes from the garment industry. Duchamp didn't invent it, he took it, ready-to-wear so to speak, to dress up the snow shovel he had just bought from a New York hardware store in 1915. In the *Theories of Surplus Value* (Book IV of *Capital*) Marx, who as always liberally supplies himself with examples taken from the industrial avant-garde of his age—and the garment industry is one—differentiates productive from unproductive labor. The artisan-tailor to whom the cloth for a pair of pants is brought and who is paid for his services is an unproductive worker, he says, while the worker-tailor employed by a merchant-tailor who derives surplus value from his labor is a productive worker. In the same way Mutt, commissioned by Richard to paint a *Waterfall,* is in the situation of Marx's artisan-tailor, and Mott's worker, who fabricates the *Fountain,* is in the situation of his worker-tailor. The artist who works for himself, for his pleasure or because he feels it a necessity, is an unproductive laborer, and it's important that he remain so if he doesn't want to end up as a pieceworker in the culture industry and mortgage his freedom. In other words, it is vital that he remain an artisan. Is that to say that he has to paint, to do handiwork, "to grind his chocolate himself"? Is it to say that he must resist the division of labor to the point of taking everything into his own hands, from the grinding of pigments all

the way through the *vernissage*? Marx's artisan-tailor is unproductive because he works to order, because he is brought the cloth for the pants and because it's his services that are paid for. This artisanship is a holdover from precapitalist relations of production. But if the artisan has his own cloth samples, if he has invested in a sewing machine, if he has his list of suppliers—and there is no lack of thread and weaving mills in Marx—he is already on the way to small business. In the same passage from *Capital,* Marx shows what artisanship has become or is in the process of becoming when it survives as an archaism walled off within the surrounding capitalist mode of production. He points out how the small artisan who works on commission sees, whether or not he wants to, whether or not he knows it, the social division of labor penetrating his own body, and lives out his own activity in the mode of division because the division of labor and of capital is the dominant mode of social relations. He is a capitalist owner of his own means of production who employs himself as wage laborer, buying his own labor power, exploiting his own overtime and pocketing the surplus value thus created. The predictable outcome of this contradiction, Marx attests, is that either the artisan prospers, ending up hiring workers and becoming a boss in his turn, or he fails, losing his means of production and ending up in the employ of someone else.

Marcel Duchamp, Vest for Benjamin Péret. *1958.*



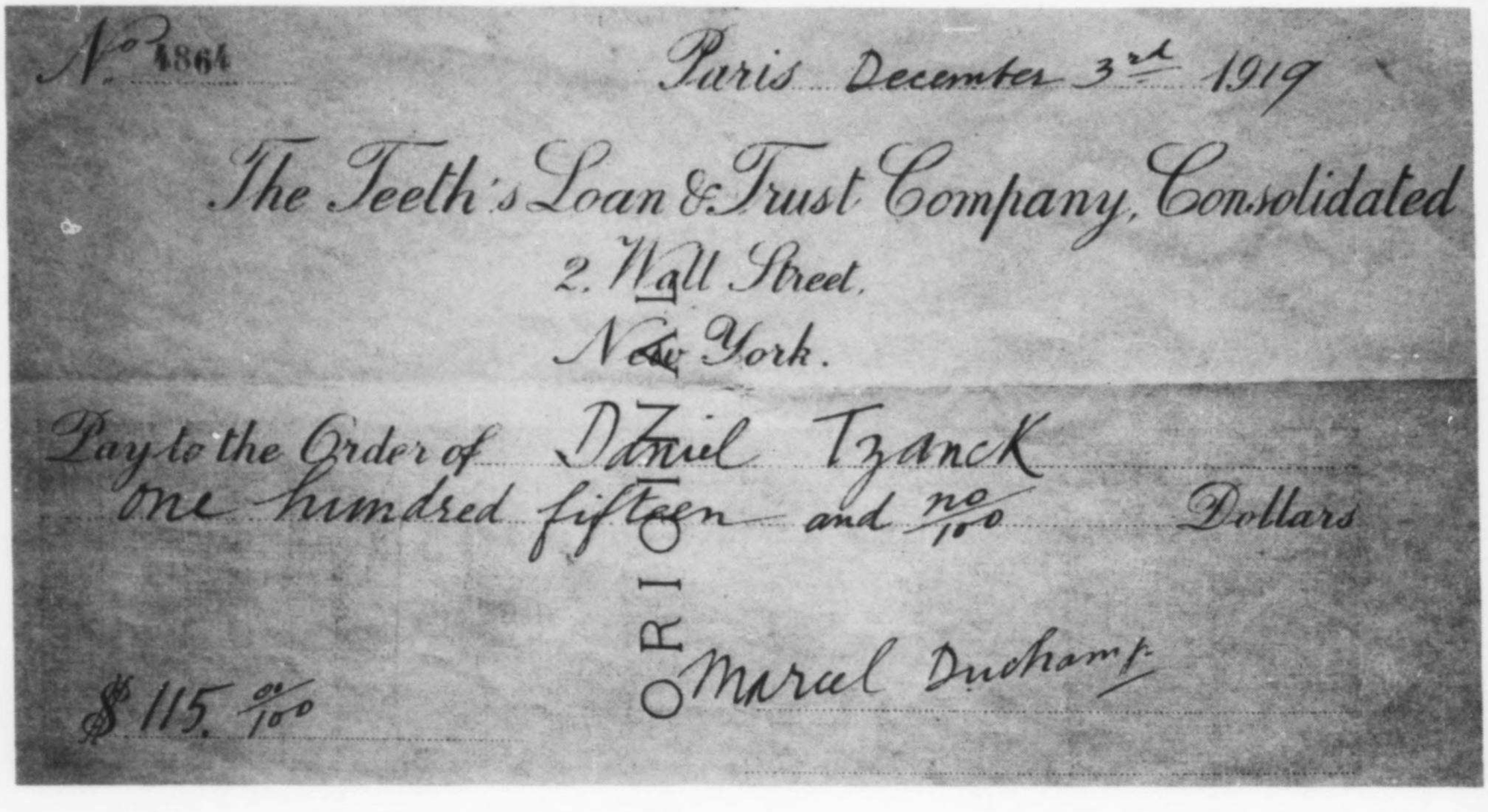
But this is not the situation of artists, or when it is, we stop talking of art in any ambitious sense of the word. Their situation—and whatever they may do, whether they paint, write, compose, or are content to put the air they breathe in vials or to can other secretions of their labor power—is to lead, against all odds, the life of an independent artisan. This has nothing to do with what they make or with the quality of their work. It has hardly more to do with their suffering or their pleasure. Those who balk at the division will make it a point of honor to slick up their work all the while decrying the decline of tradition (these are the academicians). Those who find it intolerable to be divided will identify with the proletarian in themselves without seeing that the capitalist is to be found there as well, and will look for the reconciliation outside, for example in "social sculpture" (as with Beuys). Or if they are masochists they will identify with the capitalist, without seeing that they exploit the proletarian in themselves (as with Klein). And if they are really clever they will take their stakes out of the game by making themselves into a machine (as with Warhol). But all of that is beside the point. To lead the life of an artisan without suffering or pleasure, without promising or betraying, is to live one's life as an artist in the mode of division. It means pushing away the pain of the artisan who suffers from having to exploit himself if he wants to survive, from having to mess up the job to the point of losing the pleasure and pride he gets from his work, and from having to abandon the traditional gestures of his craft to the benefit of makeshifts consuming less labor time, in a sort of existential *mise-en-abyme* for which Duchamp had the knack and through which he registered the division of labor that tears the artisan apart, separating him from himself: "Given that. . . . ; if I suppose I'm suffering a lot. . . . " (This is in *The 1914 Box*, also.) When Duchamp gives up painting in 1912 and becomes a wageworker at the Ste. Geneviève Library "in order to paint for myself," he divides up the productive and unproductive laborers within himself. Up to that point it's nothing but a lifestyle; he has still to make a life out of it, and out of this life to make his oeuvre. Duchamp the employee makes no claim to art and Duchamp the artisan has stopped producing paintings. Registered: Mott's worker stakes no claim to art and Mutt the artisan no longer paints. Down with the artisan-painter whose *Nude Descending a Staircase* and even more *The Passage of the Virgin to the Bride* had shown his talent. Down with tradition, down with the nostalgic clinging to an outmoded craft pursued under hostile conditions. And up with "the *arrhe* of painting," in the singular and the feminine. How to make *Phynance* out of that?

Let's take up once again the fable of *la Fontaine* (for it's above all a moral tale, whereas creativity is a myth and the artist-machine a fiction): At the beginning of the story Marcel Duchamp is R. Mutt, but this we won't know until the end. R. Mutt is like the little nobody who proclaims himself an artist in taking out his membership in the Society; he divides himself into a stockholder and an artisan, Richard and Mutt. Richard is like Arensberg, both of them "big" stockholders in the Society (both founding members) and both collectors (Richard is

president of the hanging committee and future founder of the Société Anonyme). Mutt is like Mott, artisan-painter or small industrialist. As artisan Mutt suffers from his person's being divided into an exploited worker and a merchant who pockets surplus value. As industrialist Mott doesn't suffer, he exploits his workers. Mutt envies Mott and fears for his trade. For a year now he hasn't stopped telling himself that he should paint (*qu'il peigne*),[3] but his *Chocolate Grinder* is already mortgaged and he is no longer anything but its *nominal* owner (says Marx). Feeling that he will soon have nothing but his creativity to sell, he withdraws his savings, stakes his all, and subcontracts. Mutt is once again like Mott, a merchant, alternately buyer and seller: Mott buys labor power and sells "items of lazy hardware," amongst which is a "faucet" that Mutt buys. At the end of the story Mutt has sold the "faucet" under a new label to Arensberg for a price virtually without a ceiling. Mott, who has got wind of the affair, just can't believe it. He gets after his workers with a prod; yet never could he extract such surplus value out of them. He shakes his head, muttering that even if he knows something about production, he understands nothing of *Phynance*. His workers have also got wind of the affair and among them there is one who chuckles. On Sundays he paints "for himself," and for the modest sum of $6.00 he took out his membership in the Independents. His name? R. Mutt.

Thus does Duchamp render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's: to Mott his means of production, which by nature are neither more nor less artistic than the brushes and tubes of paint are for a painter; to Mott's workers their labor power, i.e., their creativity, which is neither more nor less entitled to take the place that talent had in classical aesthetics than the Independents have the right to call themselves artists through wishful thinking; and to the modern artists their resistance to the destruction of their craft, which is neither more nor less justly defined by the technical specificity of the division of labor ("the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself") than by its social generality ("separation is an operation"). But Duchamp renders, as well: to Beuys the myth of creativity; to Warhol the fiction of the machine; to Klein the emptiness of exchange-value and, need we add, to Marx what belongs to Marx. Yes, everyone is an artist; no, artists don't work; yes, the wish to proclaim oneself an artist is only a wish. Yes, the proletarians are alienated; yes, the relations of production are reified; yes, dialectical materialism claims that a just practice proves a theory correct and viceversa. When the congruence between the aesthetic field and the field of political economy is perfect, there is nothing left by to make this visible; but that proves nothing. It was up to Duchamp to show this congruence, and in showing it, he rendered to everyone what belonged to Duchamp. And he, what did he pocket?

3. Translator's note: Duchamp's readymade *Peigne*, or *Comb*, is homophonic with the subjunctive of *peindre*, to paint.



Marcel Duchamp, Tzanck Check. *1919.*

The fable isn't over. Who cashed Arensberg's blank check? Apparently no one; the check was fabulous in more senses than one. Duchamp, in any case, wanted to cash nothing, not even to take out the right to speculate on what he'd just made. Speculation had already taken place, and the profits went up in smoke. And when it would occur again it would be for the benefit of Sidney Janis and Arturo Schwarz (who made replicas of *Fountain*), and for the pleasure of those art historians forced to speculate on what really happened with this "faucet which stops dripping when nobody is listening to it" but which—isn't that right, Marcel?—drips at the expense of those listening.

Fables are worth what they're worth and this one isn't even supported. We don't know how things really happened, but at least we know that it wasn't like this. The urinal wasn't behind a partition and Arensberg didn't buy it. It was at Stieglitz's to be photographed and the real Duchamp, less altruistic than the character in the fable, had certainly decided to draw interest on his investment. The question is one of knowing to what extent we are speaking through "algebraic comparison" and to what extent *the arrhe of phynance* has been superimposed on the art of finance. Should the mapping of the two on one another erase their difference in kind, then Duchamp would be nothing but an opportunist,

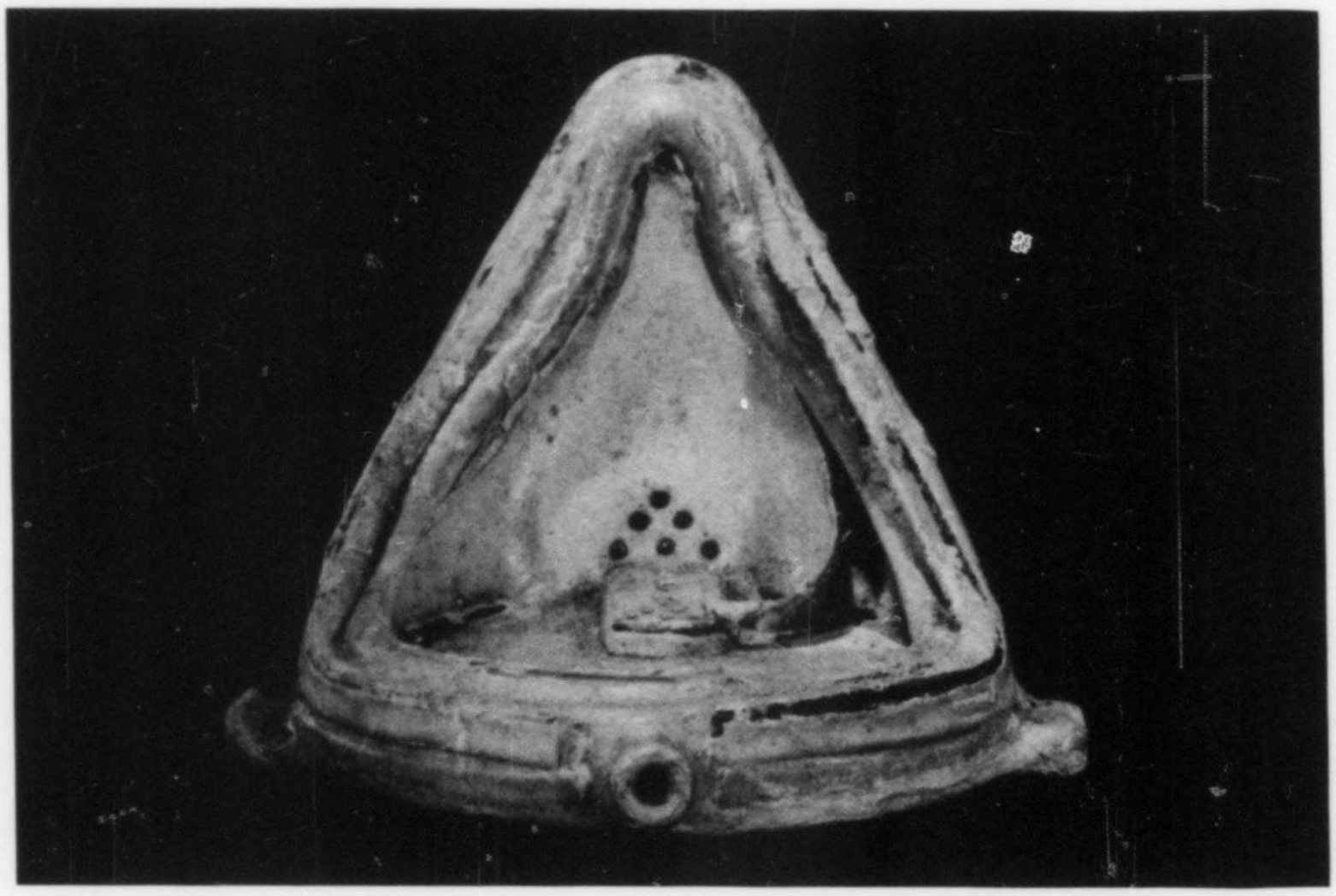
cleverer than the others. Fables, after all, are worth what their moral is worth, and it's in the real world that the moral is tested. Thus we must find the counter-proof to Arensberg's fabulous blank check. The *Tzanck Check* could be one. In December 1919, in Paris, Duchamp goes to his dentist, Daniel Tzanck, and pays for his care with a fictive check, wholly drawn by hand. Tzanck, who is also a collector and very active in Parisian avant-garde circles, knows very well what he is accepting for payment. In fact there are two transactions. Like any other dentist Tzanck presents his bill and receives a check in return. But as a means of payment the check is worthless. Like the owner of the restaurant where Paul Klee ate for years in exchange for his paintings, he lets himself be paid "in kind," that is, in works of art. But this particular work of art is a check, and a check is not very gratifying when it comes to aesthetic pleasure. In accepting it the dentist renounces being paid and it is not exactly his services that he exchanges for money but the price of his services, already expressed in money, which he barters against a *Dada Drawing* (as Picabia called it) not redeemable at the bank. Duchamp obviously knows as well as Tzanck what he is proposing for payment. He suspects that if Tzanck—like Klee's restaurant owner no doubt—accepts a work of art in payment for his care, this is not only because the art lover in him, the craftsman who knows what work well done means, has instinctively recognized the fine workmanship of the drawing the artist offers him, but also because the collector in him has instinctively recognized the speculative potential of the deal. Indeed, doesn't Duchamp suggest to him that a bank exists where the *Tzanck Check* is redeemable? It's the one on which it's drawn, *The Teeth's Loan & Trust Company, Consolidated,* which lists its legal address as 2 Wall Street, New York. Here we can savor Duchamp's marvelous humor. In inventing a New York bank (a strange thing since we're in Paris), he cloaks with English the fact that the name of the bank articulates exactly the nature of the exchange and of the complicity that forms between the two men: "I loan you my teeth, and in return you give me your trust, and thus will our relations be consolidated."

For twenty years the check stayed in the dentist's collection. During these twenty years Duchamp breathed, played chess, took part in a surrealist exhibition here and there, and, discreetly but not apologetically, performed as a broker. He sold an impressive number of modern works of art, many his own, to various people including Arensberg, his sidekick since the Richard Mutt affair. The war was approaching and the moment came to pack his (*boîte en*) valise. In 1940 he tried to interest Arensberg in the *Tzanck Check*—drawn up in 1919 for $115.00—even writing him that his dentist "would be delighted to accept $50.00 to send it to you." So much for finance: quite a shark, this Duchamp, when it was a matter of playing go-between for two of his collectors. Perhaps Tzanck had not been faithful enough to him (he only owned one other work by him and as chance would have it an investment of the same type, to wit, the *Monte Carlo Bond*). Arensberg, apparently, didn't want the check. Duchamp then approached Daniel Tzanck and bought the check back "for a lot more than it says it's worth."

So much for *phynance*: the artist had paid his dentist's bill in full, but as a check to be guaranteed on trust, *arrhe* (the down payment) required the balance.

The moral of a fable isn't dissipated within the real world, it returns to the fable, through "*symétrie commanditée*." This is Duchamp's expression and it brings finance back to *phynance*. A *commandite* is an investment in a joint-stock company with liability only for the sum invested. And this kind of company is a commercial enterprise formed of two sorts of partners; the first (the investing silent partners) bring capital without taking part in the running of the company; the others (those invested) are jointly responsible for all legal debts. In Duchamp's limited partnership we once again meet up with all the characters from the fable, as from real life: Richard/Arensberg investing in Mutt/Mott, and symmetrically, Duchamp investing in Tzanck. When he buys the check back from him he is not liable for any possible losses on the dentist's part. Arensberg had been the fabulous investor, right from the beginning. It was fair for the one who had offered a virtually limitless price for a urinal he had never possessed to assemble his protegé's work as completely as possible. But the latter is caught up in still another enterprise: a *commandite* is also a typesetters' collective working by the job. One month before making up the *Tzanck Check* Duchamp put the letters L.H.O.O.Q. in his composing stick in order to title a somewhat mustachioed reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*. Now the typesetter needs the *Tzanck Check* to have it reproduced for the *Boîte en valise*. He had understood how profitable it

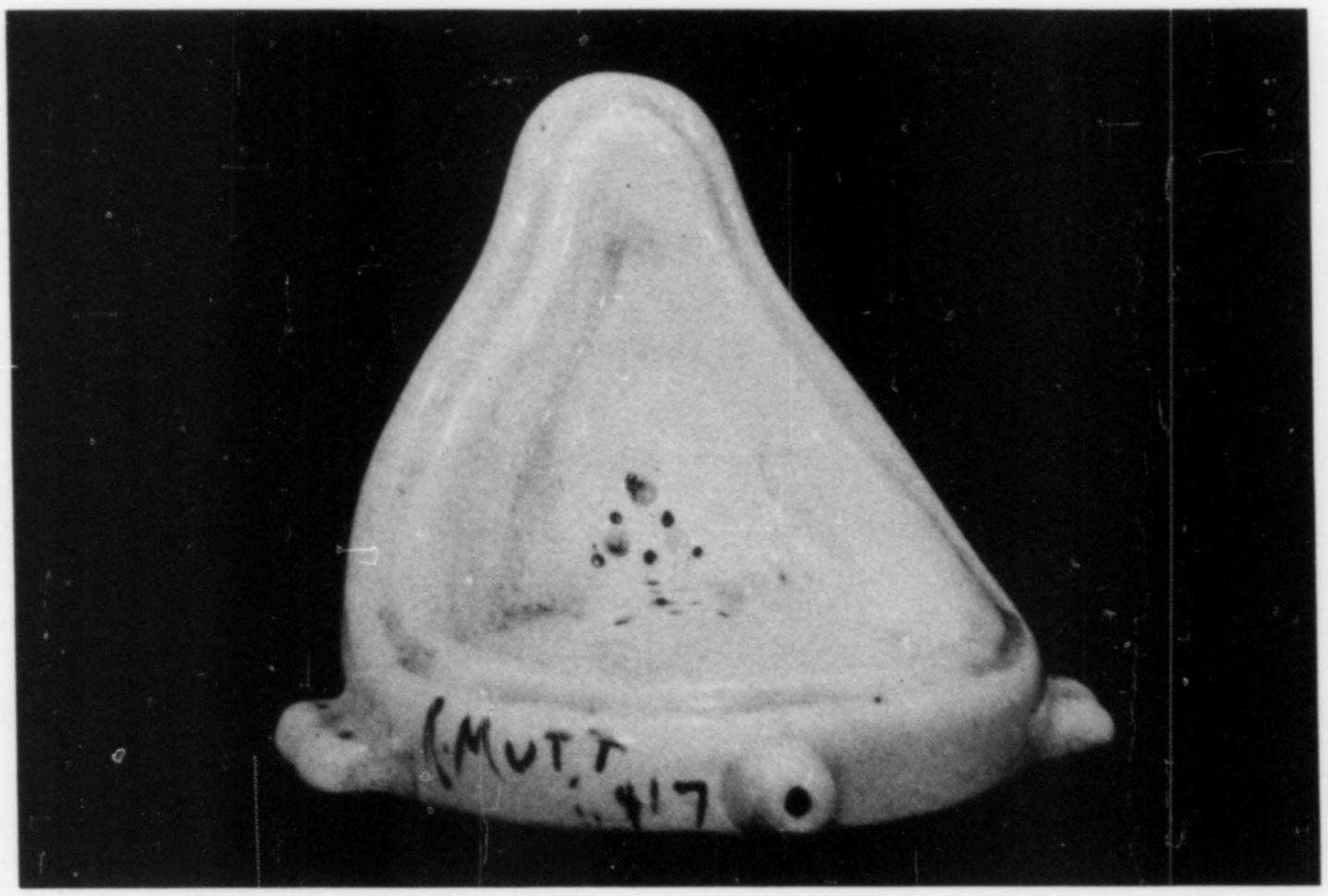
Marcel Duchamp, Fountain. *1938. (First miniature, maquette.)*



would be to keep his complete works to himself in the form—the lightest and most liquid possible—of a portable museum composed of reproductions. For Arensberg, the gold in the safe; for Duchamp, the fiat money backed up by it. He coins money on the "Arensberg Bank," or on the "Mary Sisler Bank"—in short he runs off reproductions of the works that his most faithful collectors have accumulated the way others write checks on their bank accounts. And this, dear reader, is how all the *symétries commanditées* will be fulfilled and how that which belongs to Caesar will be rendered unto Caesar.

It's a certain Phillip Bruno who in 1965 cashed Arensberg's fabulous check. The event took place during the exhibition of Mary Sisler's collection at Cordier & Ekstrom (*Not Seen and / or Less Seen of / by Marcel Duchamp / Rrose Sélavy, 1904–1964*). Included there was *L.H.O.O.Q.* echoed—through *symétrie commanditée*—by the "shaved" *Mona Lisa* which served as the invitation to the opening. The *Tzanck Check* was there as well, having in the meantime traveled from Duchamp's wallet to those of Patricia Matta, Arne Ekstrom, and finally Mary Sisler. The story doesn't tell if Phillip Bruno collected anything besides reproductions; in any case the fact remains that he made the catalogue into an album into which, without covering over the photographs, he pasted all the press clippings about the exhibition he could gather. He wished to obtain a Duchamp autograph and, with a paper clip, he whimsically attached a check blank to the page where the reproduction of *Tzanck Check* appeared, opposite the mustachioed *Mona Lisa*.

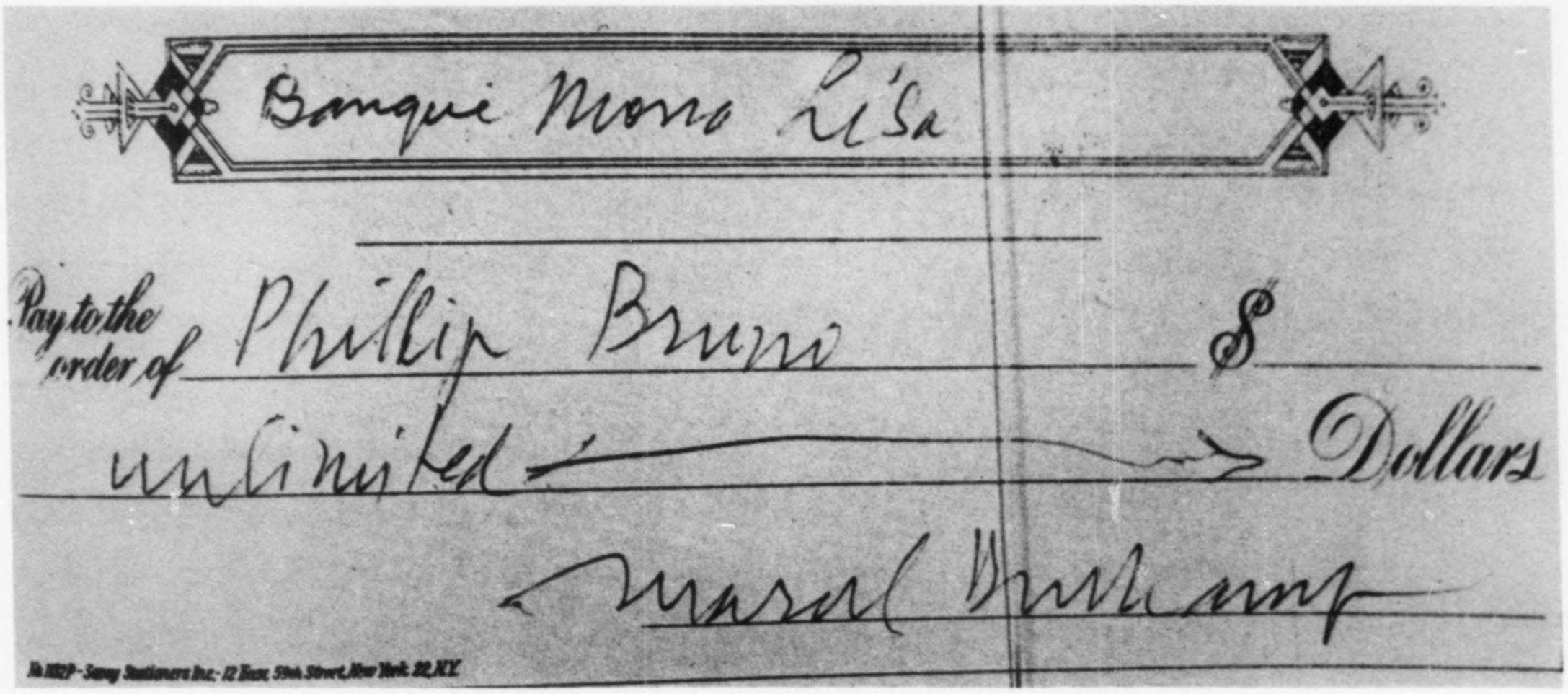
Marcel Duchamp, Fountain. *1938. (From second miniature edition.)*



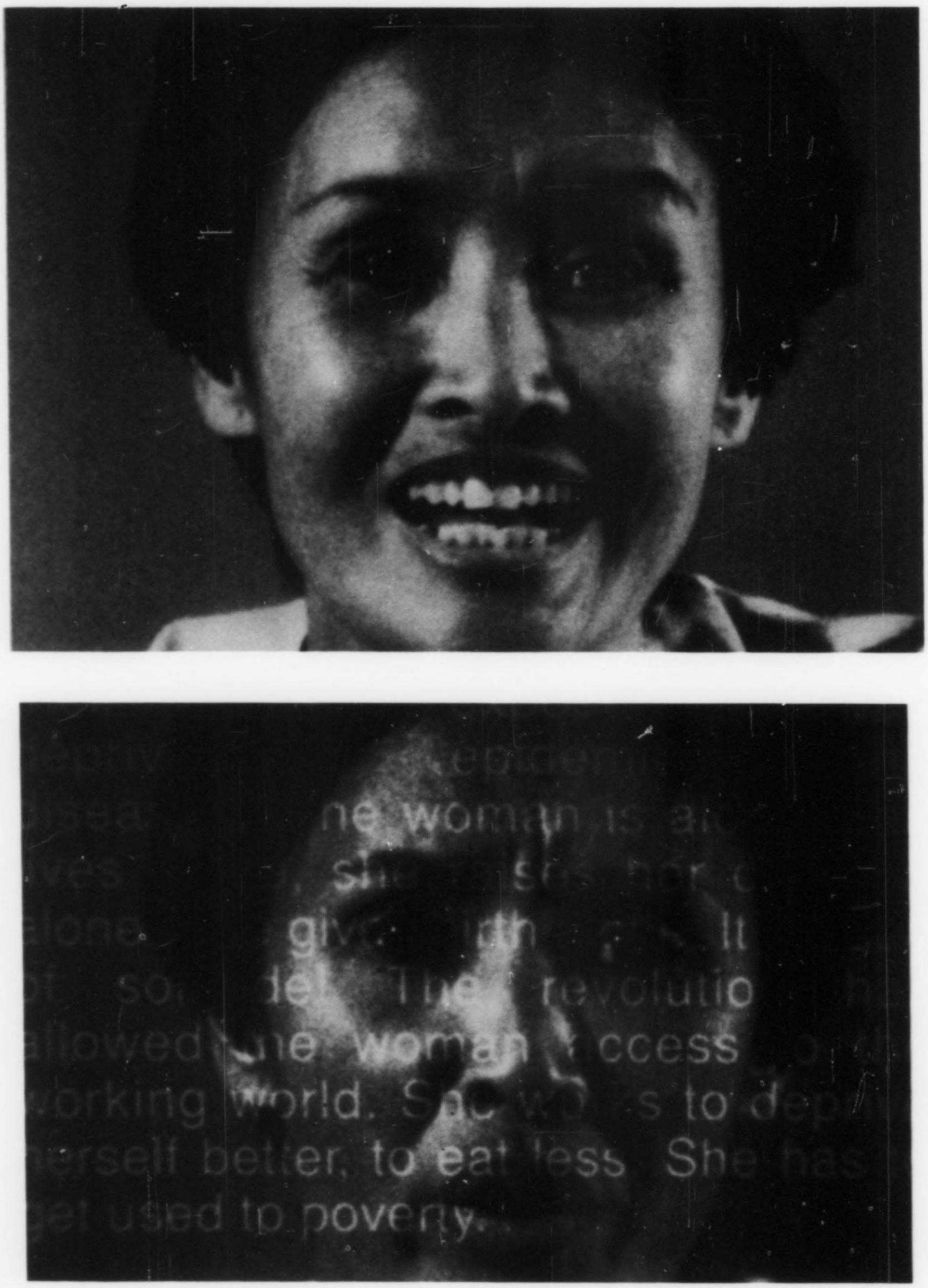
Playing the innocent, he presented Duchamp with the book opened to the page in question, awaiting his autograph. Of course Duchamp signed the check for him, filling in the amount: "unlimited"; and the bank (French this time although we're in New York): "Banque Mona Lisa."

The Mona Lisa Bank is the Louvre. Every artist, even and above all the *enfant terrible* of the avant-gardes, writes checks on tradition. They only have the value of that with which he or she repays tradition. For the *arrhe* of painting posterity will pay the balance, if it has enough of a sense of humor. The *Mona Lisa*, with and without mustaches, belongs to it. The artist has put his papers in order and organized his estate: to Leonardo the painting and to the culture industry the right to print it on T-shirts; to Rrose the enigmatic smile and to Mona the hot pants; to the cut-up Georges Hugnet the mustaches and to Marcel Duchamp the razor blades that have "cuttage" in reserve. He could recall that his only utopia had been to "establish a society in which the individual has to pay for the air he breathes" and leave to his creditors the bother of "cutting off the air in case of non-payment." He discovered for himself that he had breathed enough. On October 2, 1968, age took charge of quietly blowing out the candle. *Sélavy,* right? and *anyway, it's always the others who die.*[4]

4. *"D'ailleurs c'est toujours les autres qui meurent,"* epitaph on Duchamp's grave in the cemetery of Rouen.



Marcel Duchamp, Bruno Check. *1965.*



Trinh T. Minh-ha. Surname Viet Given Name Nam. *1989.*
(All stills are from films by the author.)

Documentary Is/Not a Name

TRINH T. MINH-HA

Nothing is poorer than a truth expressed as it was thought.

—Walter Benjamin

There is no such thing as *documentary*—whether the term designates a category of material, a genre, an approach, or a set of techniques. This assertion—as old and as fundamental as the antagonism between names and reality—needs incessantly to be restated, despite the very visible existence of a documentary tradition. In film, such a tradition, far from undergoing crisis today, is likely to fortify itself through its very recurrence of declines and rebirths. The narratives that attempt to unify/purify its practices by positing evolution and continuity from one period to the next are numerous indeed, relying heavily on traditional historicist concepts of periodization.

In a completely catalogued world, cinema is often reified into a corpus of traditions. On the one hand, truth is produced, induced, and extended according to the regime in power. On the other, truth lies in between all regimes of truth. To question the image of a historicist account of documentary as a continuous unfolding does not necessarily mean championing discontinuity; and to resist meaning does not necessarily lead to its mere denial. Truth, even when "caught on the run," does not yield itself either in names or in filmic frames; and meaning should be prevented from coming to closure at either what is said or what is shown. Truth and meaning: the two are likely to be equated with one another. Yet, what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than *a* meaning. And what persists between the meaning of something and its truth is the interval, a break without which meaning would be fixed and truth congealed. This is perhaps why it is so difficult to talk about it, the interval. About the cinema. About. The words will not ring true. Not true; for what is one to do with films that set out to determine truth from falsity while the visibility of this truth lies precisely in the fact that it is false? How is one to cope with a "film theory" that can never theorize "about" film, but only *with* concepts that film raises in relation to concepts of other practices?

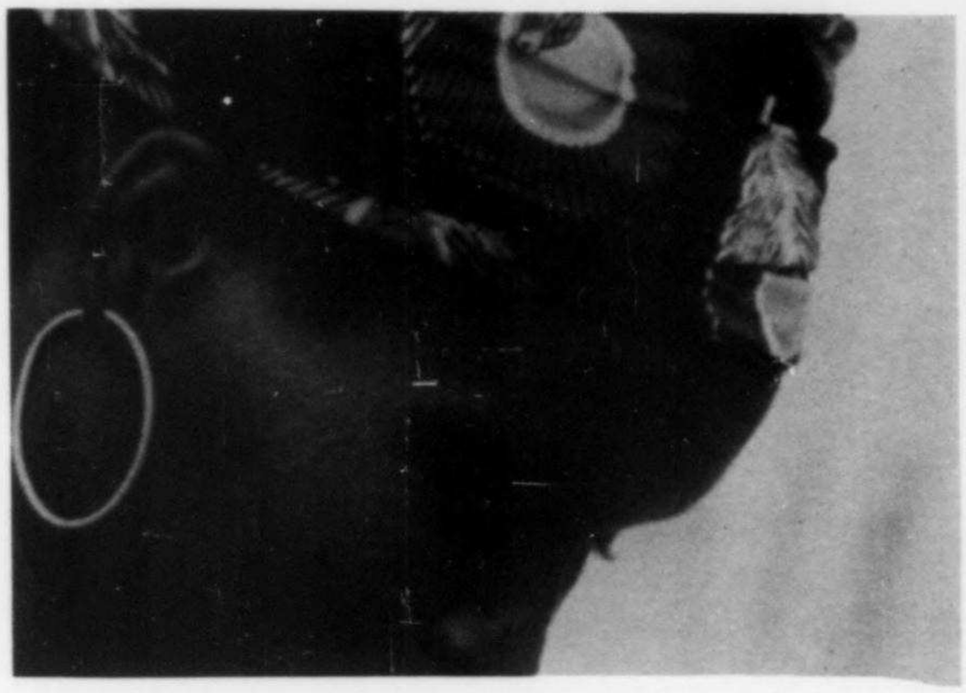
A man went to a Taoist temple and asked that his fortune be told. "First," said the priest, "you must donate incense money, otherwise the divination might not be as accurate as possible. Without such a donation, in fact, none of it will come true!"

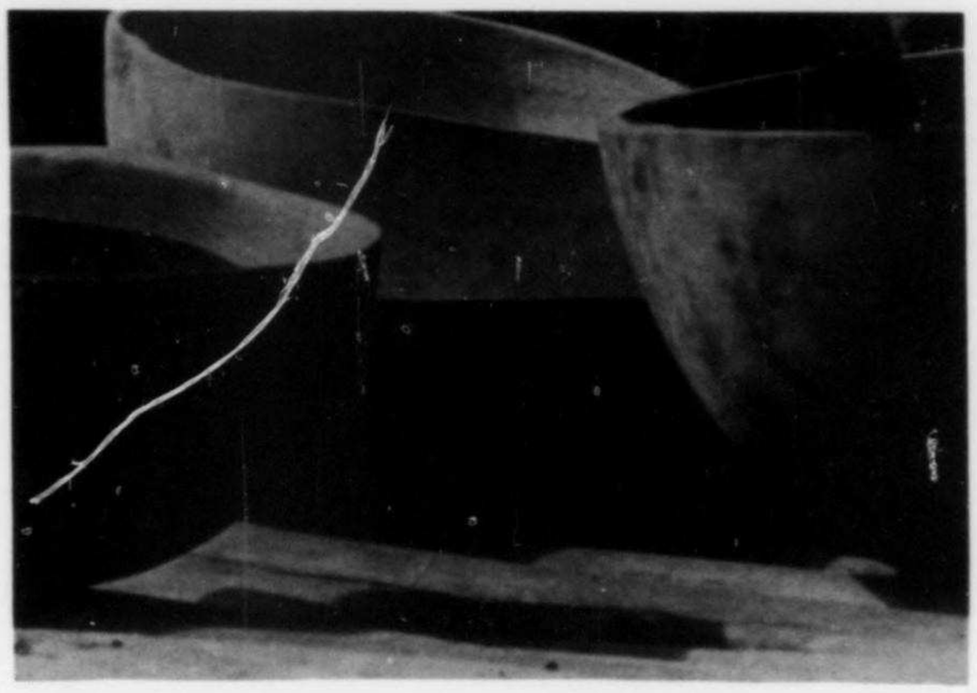
—Wit and Humor from Old Cathay

Concepts are no less practical than images or sound. And, theory does have to be (de)constructed as it (de)construes its object of study. While concepts of cinema are not readymades and do not preexist cinema, they are not theory *about* cinema either. The setting up of practice against theory, and vice-versa, is at best a tool for reciprocal challenge, but like all binary oppositions, it is caught in the net of a positivist thinking whose impetus is to supply answers at all costs, thereby limiting both theory and practice to a process of totalization. *I'm sorry, if we're going to use words we should be accurate in our use of them. It isn't a question of technique, it is a question of the material. If the material is actual, then it is documentary. If the material is invented, then it is not documentary . . . If you get so muddled up in your use of the term, stop using it. Just talk about films. Anyway, very often when we use these terms, they only give us an opportunity to avoid really discussing the film.*[1] In the general effort to analyze film and to produce "theory about film," there is an unavoidable tendency to reduce film theory to an area of specialization and of expertise, one that serves to constitute a *discipline*. There is also advocacy of an Enlightenment and bourgeois conception of language, which holds that the means of communication is the word, its object factual, its addressee a human subject (the linear, hierarchical order of things in a world of reification); whereas, language as the "medium" of communication in its most radical sense, "only communicates itself *in* itself."[2] The referential function of language is thus not negated, but freed from its false identification with the phenomenal world and from its assumed authority as a means of cognition about that world. Theory can be the very place where this negative knowledge about the reliability of theory's own operative principles is made accessible, and where theoretical categories, like all classificatory schemes, keep on being voided, rather than appropriated, reiterated, safeguarded.

Documentary is said to have come about as a need to inform the people (Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* or *Camera-Truth*), and subsequently to have affirmed itself as a reaction against the monopoly of the movie as entertainment came to have on the uses of film. Cinema was redefined as an ideal medium for social indoctrination and comment, the virtues of which lay in its capacity for "observing

1. Lindsay Anderson, as quoted in G. Roy Levin, *Documentary Explorations: Fifteen Interviews with Film-Makers*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1971, p. 66.
2. Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*, London, Verso, 1979, p. 109.





From Naked Spaces - Living is Round. *1985.*

and selecting from life itself," for "opening up the screen on the real world," for photographing "the living scene and the living story," for giving cinema "power over a million and one images," as well as for achieving "an intimacy of knowledge and effect impossible to the shimsham mechanics of the studio and the lily-fingered interpretation of the metropolitan actor."[3] Asserting its independence from the studio and the star system, documentary has its *raison d'être* in a strategic distinction. It puts the social function of film *on the market.* It takes real people and real problems from the real world and *deals with* them. It *sets a value* on intimate observation and *assesses its worth* according to how well it succeeds in capturing reality on the run, "without material interference, without intermediary." Powerful living stories, infinite authentic situations. There are no retakes. The stage is thus no more and no less than life itself. *With the documentary approach the film gets back to its fundamentals. . . . By selection, elimination and coordination of natural elements, a film form evolves which is original and not bound by theatrical or literary tradition. . . . The documentary film is an original art form. It has*

3. John Grierson, in Forsyth Hardy, ed., *Grierson On Documentary,* New York, Praeger, 1971, pp. 146-147.

come to grips with facts—on its own original level. It covers the rational side of our lives, from the scientific experiment to the poetic landscape-study, but never moves away from the factual.[4]

The real world: so real that the Real becomes the one basic referent—pure, concrete, fixed, visible, all-too-visible. The result is the advent of a whole aesthetic of objectivity and the development of comprehensive technologies of truth capable of promoting what is right and what is wrong in the world and, by extension, what is "honest" and what is "manipulative" in documentary. This involves an extensive and relentless pursuit of naturalism across all the elements of cinematic technology. Indispensable to this cinema of the authentic image and spoken word are, for example, the directional microphone (localizing and restricting in its process of selecting sound for purposes of decipherability) and the Nagra portable tape-recorder (unrivaled for its maximally faithful ability to document). Lip-synchronous sound is validated as the norm; it is a "must"—not so much in replicating reality (this much has been acknowledged among the fact-makers) as in "showing real people in real locations at real tasks." (Even non-sync sounds recorded in context are considered "less authentic" because the technique of sound synchronization and its institutionalized use have become "nature" within film culture.) Real time is thought to be more "truthful" than filmic time, hence the long-take (that is, a take lasting the length of the 400-foot roll of commercially available film stock) and minimal or no editing (change at the cutting stage is "trickery," as if montage did not happen at the stages of conception and shooting) are declared to be more appropriate if one is to avoid distortions in structuring the material. The camera is the switch onto life. Accordingly, the close-up is condemned for its partiality, while the wide angle is claimed as more objective because it includes more in the frame; hence it can mirror the event-in-context more faithfully. (The more, the larger, the truer—as if wider framing is less a framing than tighter shots.) The light-weight, hand-held camera, with its independence from the tripod—the fixed observation post—is extolled for its ability "to go unnoticed," since it must be at once mobile and invisible, integrated into the milieu so as to change as little as possible, but also able to put its intrusion to use to provoke people into uttering the "truth" they would not otherwise unveil in ordinary situations.

Thousands of bunglers have made the word [documentary] come to mean a deadly, routine form of film-making, the kind an alienated consumer society might appear to deserve—the art of talking a great deal during a film, with a commentary imposed from the outside, in order to say nothing, and to show nothing.[5] The perfectly objective social

4. Hans Richter, "Film as an Original Art Form," in R. Dyer MacCann, ed., *Film: A Montage of Theories*, New York, Dutton, 1966, p. 183.
5. Louis Morcorelles, *Living Cinema: New Directions in Contemporary Film-Making*, trans. I. Quigly, New York, Praeger, 1973, p. 37.

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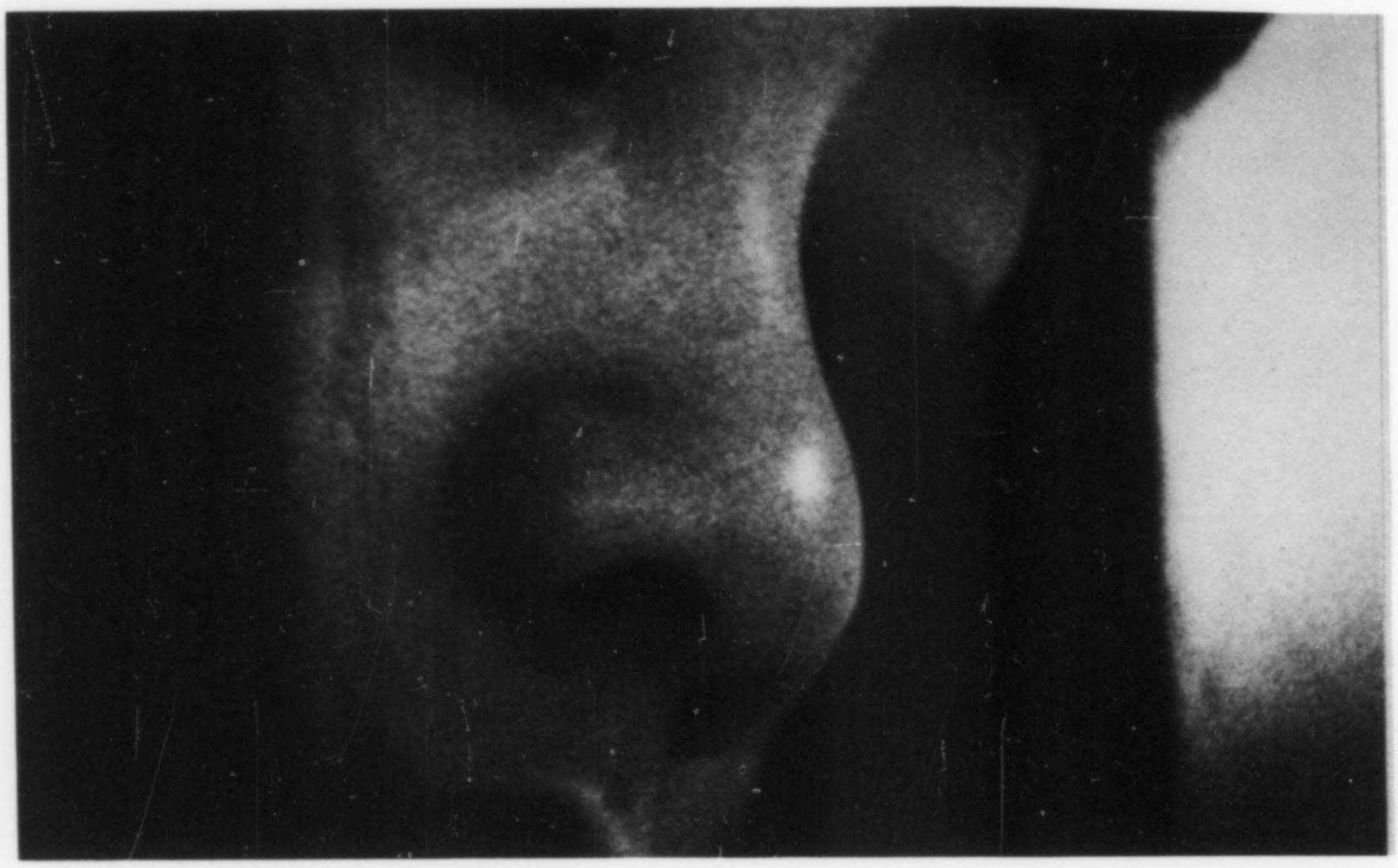
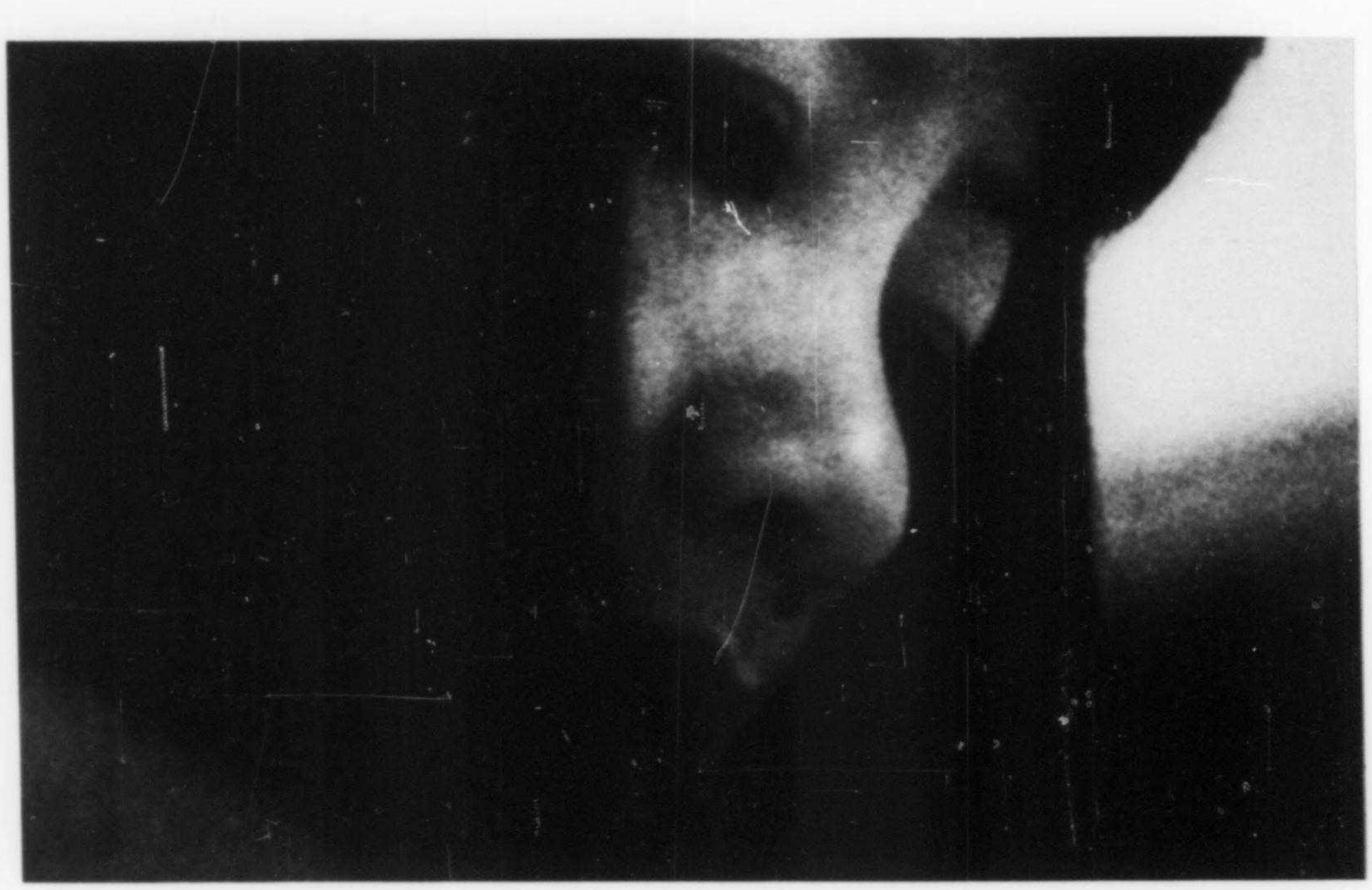




From Surname Viet Given Name Nam. *1989.*

observer may no longer stand as the cherished model among documentary-makers today, but with every broadcast the viewer, Everyman, continues to be taught that he or she is first and foremost a Spectator. Either one is not responsible for what one sees (because only the event presented counts) or the only way one can have some influence on things is by sending in (monetary) donations. Thus, though the filmmaker's perception may readily be admitted as unavoidably personal, the objectiveness of the reality of what is seen and represented remains unchallenged. *[Cinéma-vérité:] it would be better to call it cinema-sincerity. . . . That is, that you ask the audience to have confidence in the evidence, to say to the audience, "This is what I saw. I didn't fake it, this is what happened . . . I look at what happened with my subjective eye and this is what I believe took place. . . . It's a question of honesty.*[6]

What is presented as evidence remains evidence, whether the observing eye qualifies itself as being subjective or objective. At the core of such a rationale dwells, untouched, the Cartesian division between subject and object that perpetuates a dualistic inside-versus-outside, mind-against-matter view of the world. Again, the emphasis is laid on the power of film to capture reality "out there" for us "in here." The moment of appropriation and of consumption is either simply ignored or carefully rendered invisible according to the rules of good and bad documentary. The art of talking-to-say-nothing goes hand-in-hand with the will to say, and to say only to confine something in a meaning. Truth has to be made vivid, interesting; it has to be "dramatized" if it is to convince the audience of the evidence, whose "confidence" in it allows truth to take shape. *Documentary—the presentation of actual facts in a way that makes them credible and telling to people at the time.*[7]

The real? Or the repetitive, artificial resurrection of the real, an operation whose overpowering success in substituting the visual and verbal signs of the real for the real itself ultimately helps challenge the real, thereby intensifying the uncertainties engendered by any clear-cut division between the two. In the scale of what is more and what is less real, subject matter is of prime importance ("It is very difficult if not impossible," says a film festival administrator, "to ask jurors of a panel in the documentary film category not to identify the quality of a film with the subject it treats"). The focus is undeniably on common experience, by which the "social" is defined: an experience that features, as a famed documentary-maker (Pierre Perrault) put it (paternalistically): "man, simple man, who has never expressed himself."[8]

The socially oriented filmmaker is thus the almighty voice-giver (here, in

6. Jean Rouch, as quoted in *Documentary Explorations*, p. 135.
7. William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 73.
8. Quoted in *Living Cinema*, p. 26.

a vocalizing context that is all-male), whose position of authority in the production of meaning continues to go unchallenged, skillfully masked as it is by its righteous mission. The relationship between mediator and medium, or the mediating activity, is either ignored—that is, assumed to be transparent, as value-free and as insentient as an instrument of reproduction ought to be—or else, it is treated most conveniently: by humanizing the gathering of evidence so as to further the status quo ("Of course, like all human beings I am subjective, but nonetheless, I have confidence in the evidence!"). Good documentaries are those whose subject matter is "correct" and whose point of view the viewer agrees with. What is involved may be a question of honesty (vis-à-vis the material), but it is often also a question of (ideological) adherence, hence of legitimization.

Films made about the common people are, furthermore, naturally promoted as films made for the same people, and only for them. In the desire to service the needs of the un-expressed, there is, commonly enough, the urge to define them and their needs. More often than not, for example, when filmmakers find themselves in debates in which a film is criticized for its simplistic and reductive treatment of a subject, resulting in a maintenance of the very status quo it sets out to challenge, their tendency is to dismiss the criticism by arguing that the film is not made for "sophisticated viewers like ourselves, but for a general audience," thereby situating themselves above and apart from the *real* audience, those "out there," the simple-minded folks who need everything they see explained to them. Despite the shift of emphasis—from the world of the upwardly mobile and the very affluent that dominates the media to that of "their poor"—what is maintained intact is the age-old opposition between the creative, intelligent supplier and the mediocre, unenlightened consumer. The pretext for perpetuating such division is the belief that social relations are determinate, hence endowed with objectivity. *By "impossibility of the social" I understand . . . the assertion of the ultimate impossibility of all "objectivity" . . . society presents itself, to a great degree, not as an objective, harmonic order, but as an ensemble of divergent forces which do not seem to obey any unified or unifying logic. How can this experience of the failure of objectivity be made compatible with the affirmation of an ultimate objectivity of the real?*[9] The silent common people—those who "have never expressed themselves" unless they are given the opportunity to voice their thoughts by the one who comes to redeem them—are constantly summoned to signify the real world. They are the fundamental referent of the social, hence it suffices to point the camera at them, to show their (industrialized) poverty, or to contextualize and package their unfamiliar lifestyles for the ever-buying and donating general audience "back here," in order to enter the sanctified realm of the morally right, or the social. In

9. Ernesto Laclau, as quoted in "Building a New Left: An Interview with Ernest Laclau," *Strategies*, no. 1 (Fall 1988), p. 15.

other words, when the so-called "social" reigns, how these people(/we) come to visibility in the media, how meaning is given to their(/our) lives, how their(/our) truth is construed or how truth is laid down for them(/us) and despite them(/us), how representation relates to or *is* ideology, how media hegemony continues its relentless course is simply not at issue.

> *There isn't any* cinéma-vérité. *It's necessarily a lie, from the moment the director intervenes—or it isn't cinema at all.*
>
> —Georges Franju

When the social is hypostatized and enshrined as an ideal of transparency, when it itself becomes commodified in a form of sheer administration (better service, better control), the interval between the real and the image/d or between the real and the rational shrinks to the point of unreality. Thus, to address the question of production relations, as raised earlier, is endlessly to reopen the question: how is the real (or the social ideal of good representation) produced? Rather than catering to it, striving to capture and discover its truth as a concealed or lost object, it is therefore important also to keep asking: how is truth being ruled? *The penalty of realism is that it is about reality and has to bother forever not about being 'beautiful' but about being right.*[10]

The fathers of documentary initially insisted that documentary is not News, but Art (a "new and vital art form," as Grierson once proclaimed): that its essence is not information (as with "the hundreds of tweeddle-dum 'industrials' or worker-education films"); not reportage; not newsreels; but something close to "a creative treatment of actuality" (Grierson's renowned definition).

Documentary may be anti-aesthetic, as some still affirm in the line of the British forerunner, but it is claimed to be no less an art, albeit an art within the limits of factuality. When, in a world of reification, truth is widely equated with fact, any explicit use of the magic, poetic, or irrational qualities specific to the film medium itself would have to be excluded a priori as nonfactual. The question is not so much one of sorting out—illusory as this may be—what is inherently factual from what is not in a body of *preexisting* filmic techniques, as it is one of abiding by the laws of naturalism in film. In the reality of formula-films, only validated techniques are *right*, others are de facto wrong. All, however, depend on their degree of invisibility in producing meaning. Thus, shooting at any speed other than the standard 24-frames-per-second (the speed necessitated for lip-sync sound) is, for example, often condemned as a form of manipulation, implying thereby that manipulativeness has to be discreet—that is, acceptable only when

10. Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 249.

From Surname Viet Given Name Nam. *1989.*

not easily perceptible to the "real audience." Although the whole of filmmaking *is* a question of manipulation—whether "creative" or not—those endorsing the law unhesitatingly decree which technique is manipulative and which, supposedly, is not; and this judgment is made according to the degree of visibility of each. *A documentary film is shot with three cameras: 1) the camera in the technical sense; 2) the filmmaker's mind; and 3) the generic patterns of the documentary film, which are founded on the expectations of the audience that patronizes it. For this reason one cannot simply say that the documentary film portrays facts. It photographs isolated facts and assembles from them a coherent set of facts according to three divergent schemata. All remaining possible facts and factual contexts are excluded. The naive treatment of documentation therefore provides a unique opportunity to concoct fables. In and of itself, the documentary is no more realistic than the feature film.*[11]

Reality is more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction. To understand this is to recognize the naiveté of a development of cinematic technology that promotes increasingly unmediated access to reality. It is to see through the poverty of what Benjamin deplored as "a truth expressed as it was thought" and to understand why progressive fiction films are attracted by and constantly pay tribute to documentary techniques. These films put the "documentary effect" to advantage, playing on the viewer's expectations in order to "concoct fables." The documentary can easily thus become a "style": it no longer constitutes a mode of production or an attitude toward life, but proves to be only an element of aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics), which at best, and without acknowledging it, it tends to be in any case when, within its own factual limits, it reduces itself to a mere category, or a set of persuasive techniques. Many of these techniques have become so "natural" to the language of broadcast television that they "go unnoticed." These are, for example, the "personal testimony" technique (a star appears on screen to advertize his or her use of a certain product); the "plain folks" technique (a politician arranges to eat hot dogs in public); the "band wagon" technique (the use of which conveys the message that "everybody is doing it, why not you?"); or the "card stacking" technique (in which prearrangements for a "survey" show that a certain brand of product is more popular than any other to the inhabitants of a given area).[12]

You must re-create reality because reality runs away; reality denies reality. You must first interpret it, or re-create it. . . . When I make a documentary, I try to give the realism an artificial aspect. . . . I find that the aesthetic of a document comes from the artificial aspect of the document . . . it has to be more beautiful than realism, and therefore it

11. Alexander Kluge, as quoted in *Alexander Kluge, A Retrospective*, New York, The Goethe Institutes of North America, 1988, p. 4.
12. John Mercer, *An Introduction to Cinematography*, Champaign, Illinois, Stipes Publishing Co., 1968, p. 159.

has to be composed . . . to give it another sense.[13] A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction. It does not work to conceal or exclude what is normalized as "non-factual," for it understands the mutual dependence of realism and "artificiality" in the process of filmmaking. It recognizes the necessity of composing (on) life in living it or making it. Documentary reduced to a mere vehicle of facts may be used to advocate a cause, but it does not constitute one in itself; hence the perpetuation of the bipartite system of division in the content-versus-form rationale. To compose is not always synonymous with ordering-so-as-to-persuade, and to give the filmed document another sense, another meaning, is not necessarily to distort it. If life's paradoxes and complexities are not to be suppressed, the question of degree and nuance is incessantly crucial. Meaning can therefore be political only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized, and when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but, rather, empties or decentralizes it. Thus, even when this source is referred to, it stands as one among many others, at once plural and utterly singular. In its demand to *mean* at any rate, the "documentary" often forgets how it comes about and how aesthetics and politics remain inseparable in its constitution. For, when not equated with mere techniques of beautifying, aesthetics allows one to experience life differently, or as some would say, to give it "another sense," remaining in tune with its drifts and shifts.

From its descriptions to its arrangements and rearrangements, reality on the move may be heightened or impoverished but is never neutral (that is, objective). *Documentary at its purest and most poetic is a form in which the elements that you use are the actual elements.*[14] The notion of "making strange" and of reflexivity remains but a mere distancing device so long as the division between "textual artifice" and "social attitude" exerts its power.[15] The "social" continues to go unchallenged, history keeps on being salvaged, while the sovereignty of the socio-historicizing subject is safely maintained. With the status quo of the making/consuming subject preserved, the aim is to correct "errors" (the false) and to construct an alternative view (offered as a this-is-the-true or mine-is-truer version of reality). It is, in other words, to replace one source of unacknowledged authority by another, but not to challenge the very constitution of authority. The new socio-historical text thus rules despotically as another master-centered text, since it unwittingly helps to perpetuate the Master's ideological stance.

13. Georges Franju, as quoted in *Documentary Explorations*, pp. 121, 128.
14. Lindsay Anderson, as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 66.
15. This distinction motivates Dana Polan's argument in, "A Brechtian Cinema? Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film,"in B. Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods*, vol. 2, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1985, pp. 661-672.

When the textual and the political neither separate themselves from one another nor simply collapse into a single qualifier, the practice of representation can, similarly, neither be taken for granted nor merely dismissed as being ideologically reactionary. By putting representation under scrutiny, textual theory/practice has more likely helped to upset rooted ideologies by bringing the mechanics of their inner workings to the fore. It makes possible the vital differentiation between authoritative criticism and uncompromising analyses and inquiries (including those of the analyzing/inquiring activity). Moreover, it contributes to a questioning of reformist "alternative" approaches that never quite depart from the lineage of white- and male-centered humanism. Despite their explicit socio-political commitment, in the end these approaches remain unthreatening, that is, "framed," and thus neither social nor political enough.

Reality runs away, reality denies reality. Filmmaking is after all a question of "framing" reality in its course. However, it can also be the very place where the referential function of the film image/sound is not simply negated, but reflected upon in its own operative principles and questioned in its authoritative identification with the phenomenal world. In attempts to suppress the mediation of the cinematic apparatus and the fact that language "communicates itself in itself," there always lurks a bourgeois conception of language. *Any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality . . . so that a break between ideology and text is effected.*[16]

To deny the *reality* of film in claiming (to capture) *reality* is to stay "in ideology"—that is, to indulge in the (deliberate or not) confusion of filmic with phenomenal reality. By condemning self-reflexivity as pure formalism instead of challenging its diverse realizations, this ideology can "go on unnoticed," keeping its operations invisible and serving the goal of universal expansionism. Such aversion against reflexivity goes hand in hand with its widespread appropriation as a progressive, formalistic device in cinema, since both work to reduce its function to a harmlessly decorative one. (For example, it has become commonplace to hear such remarks as "a film is a film" or "this is a film about a film." Film-on-film statements are increasingly challenging to work with because they can easily fall prey to their own formulas and techniques.) Furthermore, reflexivity at times equated with a personal perspective, is at other times endorsed as scientific rigor.

16. Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1, 1976, p. 215.

From Surname Viet Given Name Nam. *1989.*

Two men were discussing the joint production of wine. One said to the other: "You shall supply the rice and I the water." The second asked: "If all the rice comes from me, how shall we apportion the finished product?" The first man replied: "I shall be absolutely fair about the whole thing. When the wine is finished, each gets back exactly what he puts in—I'll siphon off the liquid and you can keep the rest."

—Wit and Humor from Old Cathay

One of the areas of documentary that remains most resistant to the reality of film-as-film is that known as anthropological filmmaking. Filmed ethnographic material, which for a long time was thought to "replicate natural perception," has renounced this authority only to purport to provide adequate "data" for the "sampling" of culture. The claim to objectivity may no longer stand in many anthropological circles, but its authority is likely to be replaced by the sacrosanct notion of the "scientific." Thus the recording and gathering of data and of people's testimonies are considered to be the limited aim of "ethnographic film." What makes a film anthropological and what makes it scientific, tautologically enough, is its "scholarly endeavor [to] respectively document and interpret according to anthropological standards."[17] Not merely ethnographic or documentary, as this definition specifies, but "scholarly" and anthropological, a fundamental scientific obsession is present in every attempt to demarcate anthropology's territories. In order to be scientifically valid, a film needs the scientific intervention of the anthropologist, for it is only by adhering to the body of conventions set up by the community of anthropologists accredited by their "discipline" that the film can hope to qualify for the classification and be passed as a "scholarly endeavor."

One of the familiar arguments given by anthropologists to validate their prescriptively instrumental use of film and of people is to dismiss all works by filmmakers who are "not professional anthropologists" or "amateur ethnographers" under the pretext that they are not "anthropologically informed," hence they have "no theoretical significance from an anthropological point of view." To advance such a blatantly self-promoting rationale to institute "a deadly routine form of filmmaking" (to quote a sentence of Marcorelles once more) is also—through anthropology's primary task of "collecting data" for knowledge of mankind—to try to skirt what is known as the "salvage paradigm" and the issues implicated in the scientific deployment of Western world ownership.[18] The stronger anthropology's insecurity about its own project, the greater its eagerness to hold up a normative model, and the more seemingly serene its disposition to dwell in its own blinkered field.

In the sanctified terrain of anthropology, all of filmmaking is reduced to a question of method. It is demonstrated that the reason anthropological films go further than ethnographic films is because they do not, for example, just show activities being performed, but they also *explain* the "anthropological significance" of these activities (significance that, despite the disciplinary qualifier *anthropological*, is de facto identified with the meaning the natives give them

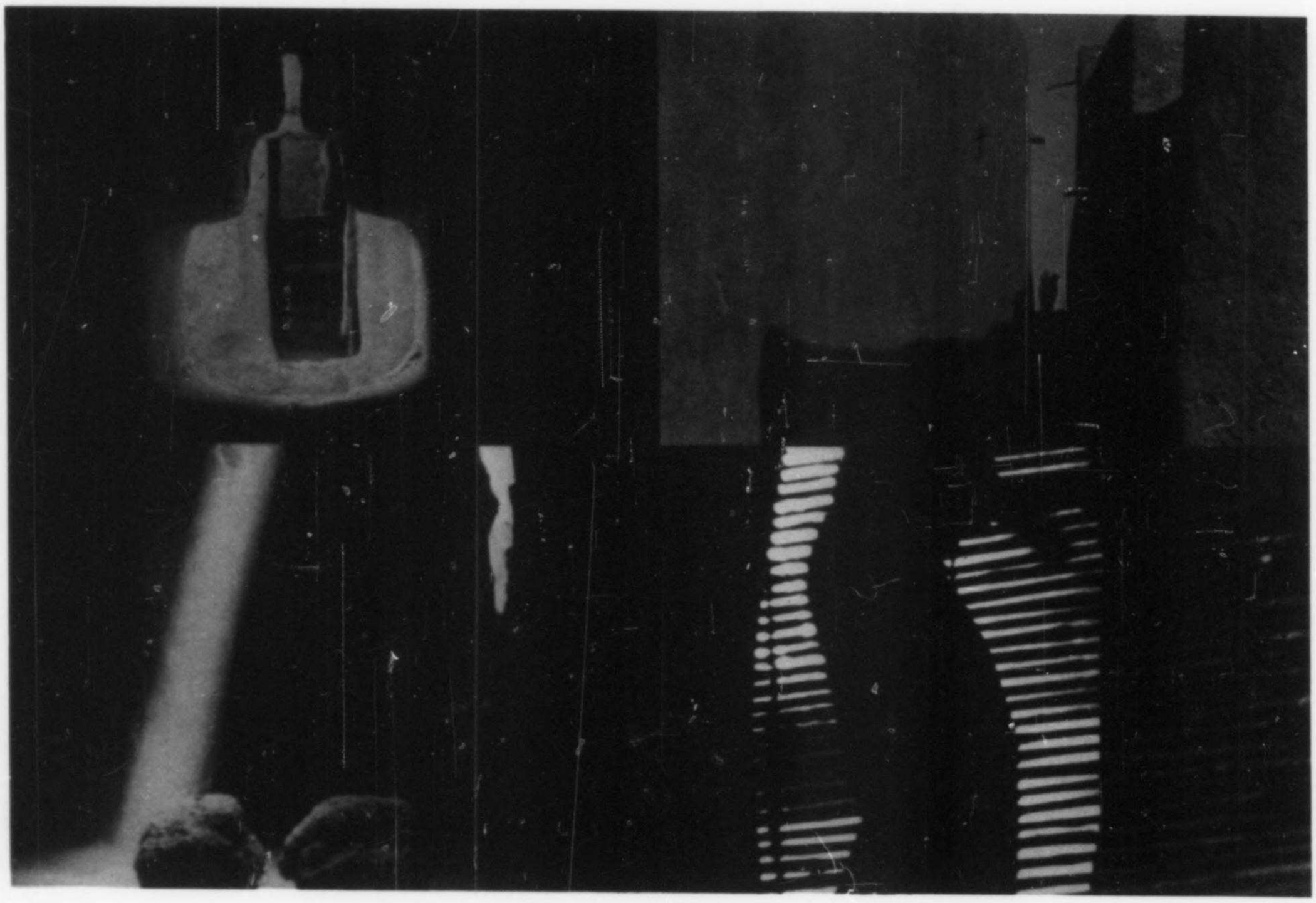
17. Henk Ketelaar, "Methodology in Anthropological Filmmaking. A Filmmaking Anthropologist's Poltergeist?" in N. Bogaart and Henk Ketelaar, eds., *Methodology in Anthropological Filmmaking*, Gottingen, Herodot, 1983, p. 182.
18. See James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the 'Salvage Paradigm,'" in Hal Foster, ed., *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Seattle, Washington, Bay Press, 1987, pp. 121-130.

themselves). Now, obviously, in the process of fixing meaning, not every explanation is valid. This is where the expert anthropologist plays his role and where methodologies need to be devised, legitimated, and enforced. For, if a non-professional explanation is dismissed here, it is not so much because it lacks insight or theoretical grounding, as because it escapes anthropological control. In the name of science, a distinction is made between reliable and unreliable information. Anthropological and non-anthropological explanations may share the same subject matter, but they differ in the way they produce meaning. The unreliable constructs are the ones that do not obey the rules of anthropological authority, which a concerned expert like Evans-Pritchard skillfully specifies as being nothing else but "a scientific habit of mind."[19] Science defined as the most appropriate approach to the object of investigation serves as a banner for every scientific attempt to promote the West's paternalistic role as subject of knowledge and its historicity of the Same. *The West agrees with us today that the way to Truth passes by numerous paths, other than Aristotelian Thomistic logic or Hegelian dialectic. But social and human sciences themselves must be decolonized.*[20]

In its scientific "quest to make meaning," anthropology constantly reactivates the power relations embedded in the Master's confident discourses on Himself and His Other, thereby aiding both the *centri*petal and *centri*fugal movement of their global spread. With the diverse challenges issued today to the very process of producing "scientific" interpretations of culture as well as to that of making anthropological knowledge possible, visually oriented members of its community have come up with an epistemological position in which the notion of reflexivity is typically reduced to a question of technique and method. Equated with a form of self-exposure common in field work, it is discussed at times as *self-reflectivity* and at other times condemned as individualistic idealism sorely in need of being controlled if the individual maker is not to loom larger than the scientific community or the people observed. Thus, "being reflexive is virtually synonymous with being scientific."[21] The reasons justifying such a statement are many, but one that can be read through it and despite it is: as long as the maker abides by a series of "reflexive" techniques in filmmaking that are devised for the purpose of exposing the "context" of production and as long as the required techniques are method(olog)ically carried out, the maker can be assured that "reflexivity" is elevated to that status of scientific rigor. These reflexive techniques would include the insertion of a verbal or visual narrative about the anthropologist, the methodology adopted, and the condition of production—in

19. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980.
20. E. Mveng, "Récents développements de la théologie africaine," *Bulletin of African Theology*, vol. 5, p. 9; as quoted in V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 37.
21. Jay Ruby, "Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology and Film," *Semiotica*, no. 30 (1980), p. 165.

other words, all the conventional means of validating an anthropological text through the disciplinary practice of head- and footnoting and the totalistic concept of pre-production presentation. Those who reject such a rationale do so out of a preoccupation with the "community of scientists," whose collective judgment they feel should be the only true form of reflection. For, an individual validation of a work can only be suspicious because it "ignores the historical development of science." In these constant attempts at enforcing anthropology as (a) discipline and at recentering dominant representation of culture (despite all the changes in methodologies), what seems to be oddly suppressed in the notion of reflexivity in filmmaking is its practice as processes to prevent meaning from



From Naked Spaces - Living is Round. *1985.*

ending with what is said and what is shown and—through inquiries into production relations—thereby to challenge representation itself even while emphasizing the reality of the experience of film as well as the important role that reality plays in the lives of the spectators.

> *Unless an image displaces itself from its natural state, it acquires no significance. Displacement cause resonance.*
>
> —Shanta Gokhale [22]

As an aesthetic closure or an old relativizing gambit in the process nonetheless of absolutizing meaning, reflexivity proves critically in/significant when it merely serves to refine and to further the accumulation of knowledge. No going beyond, no elsewhere-within-here seems possible if the reflection on oneself is not at one and the same time the analysis of established forms of the social that define one's limits. Thus to drive the self into an abyss is neither a moralistic stricture against oneself nor a task of critique that humanizes the decoding self but never challenges the very notion of self and decoder. Left intact in its positionality and its fundamental urge to decree meaning, the self conceived both as key and as transparent mediator, is more often than not likely to turn responsibility into license. The license to *name*, as though meaning presented itself to be deciphered without any ideological mediation. As though specifying a context can only result in the finalizing of what is shown and said. As though naming can stop the process of naming: that very abyss of the relation of self to self.

The bringing of the self into play necessarily exceeds the concern for human errors, for it cannot but involve as well the problem inherent in representation and communication. Radically plural in its scope, reflexivity is thus not a mere question of *rect*ifying and *just*ifying (*subject*ivizing). What is set in motion in its praxis are the self-generating links between different forms of reflexivity. Thus, a subject who points to him or herself as subject-in-process, a work that displays its own formal properties or its own constitution as work, is bound to upset one's sense of identity—the familiar distinction between the Same and the Other since the latter is no longer kept in a recognizable relation of dependence, derivation, or appropriation. The process of self-constitution is also that in which the self vacillates and loses its assurance. The paradox of such a process lies in its fundamental instability; an instability that brings forth the disorder inherent in every order. The "core" of representation is the reflexive

22. Shanta Gokhale, as quoted in Uma da Cunha, ed., *The New Generation, 1960-1980*, New Delhi, The Directorate of Film Festivals, 1981, p. 114.

interval. It is the place in which the play within the textual frame is a play on this very frame, hence on the borderlines of the textual and extra-textual, where a positioning within constantly incurs the risk of de-positioning, and where the work, never freed from historical and socio-political contexts nor entirely subjected to them, can only be itself by constantly risking being no-thing.

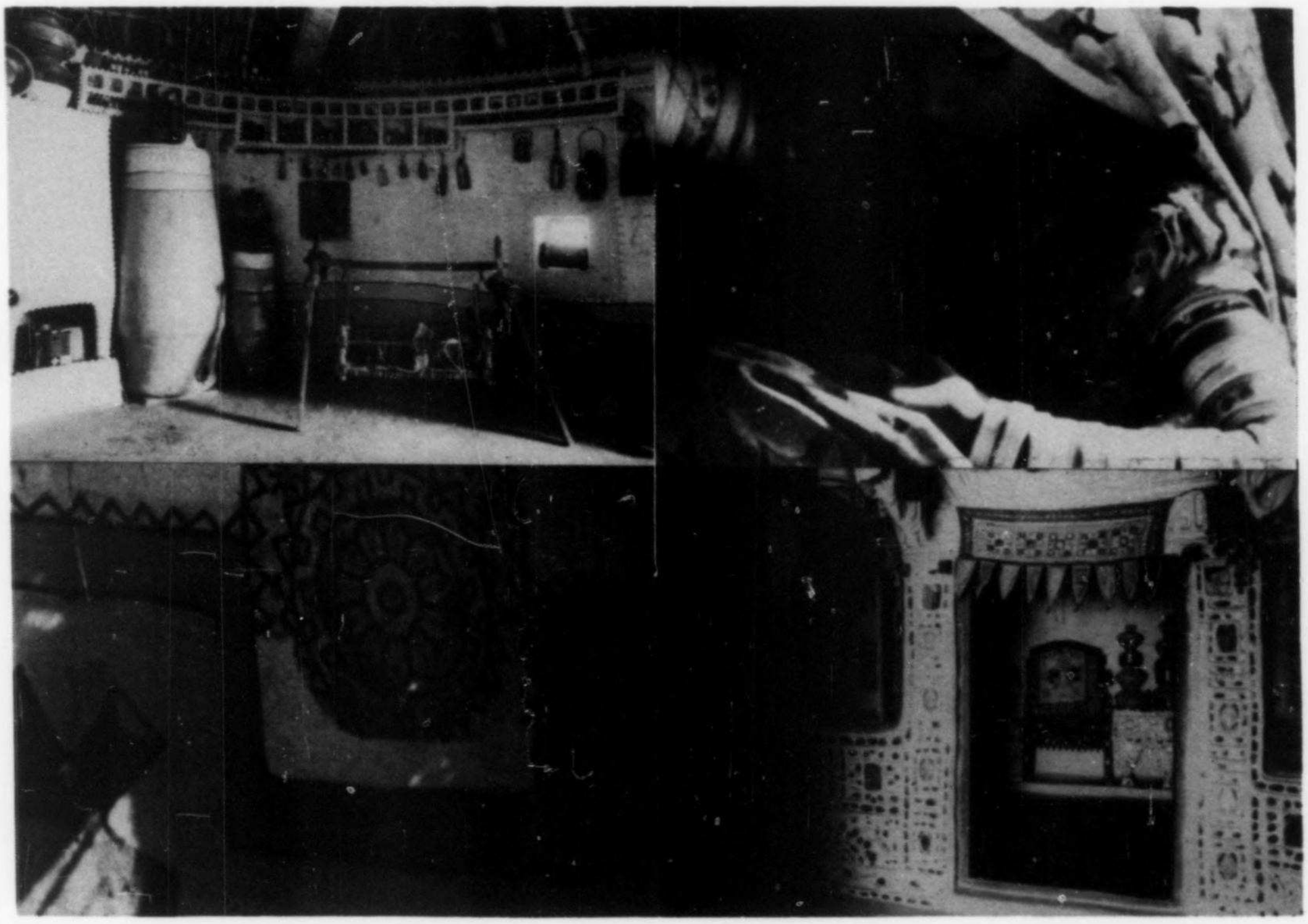
A work that reflects back on itself offers itself infinitely as nothing else but work . . . and void. Its gaze is at once an impulse that causes the work to fall apart (to return to the initial no-work-ness) and an ultimate gift to its constitution. A gift, by which the work is freed from the tyranny of meaning as well as from the omnipresence of a subject of meaning. To let go of the hold at the very moment when it is at its most effective is to allow the work to live, and to live on independently of the intended links, communicating itself in itself, like Benjamin's "the self is a text"—no more and no less "a project to be built."[23] *Orpheus' gaze . . . is the impulse of desire which shatters the song's destiny and concern, and in that inspired and unconcerned decision reaches the origin, consecrates the song.*[24]

Meaning can neither be imposed nor denied. Although every film is in itself a form of ordering and closing, each closure can defy its own closure, opening onto other closures, thereby emphasizing the interval between apertures and creating a space in which meaning remains fascinated by what escapes and exceeds it. The necessity to let go of the notion of intentionality that dominates the question of the "social" as well as that of creativity cannot therefore be confused with the ideal of nonintervention, an ideal in relation to which the filmmaker, trying to become as invisible as possible in the process of producing meaning, promotes empathic subjectivity at the expense of critical inquiry even when the intention is to show and to condemn oppression. *It is idealist mystification to believe that 'truth' can be captured by the camera or that the conditions of a film's production (e.g., a film made collectively by women) can* of itself *reflect the conditions of its production. This is mere utopianism: new meaning has to* be manufactured *within the text of the film. . . . What the camera in fact grasps is the 'natural' world of the dominant ideology.*[25]

In the quest for totalized meaning and for knowledge-for-knowledge's sake, the worst meaning is meaninglessness. A Caucasian missionary nun based in a remote village of Africa qualifies her task in these simple, confident terms: "We are here to help people give meaning to their lives." Ownership is monotonously circular in its give-and-take demands. It is a monolithic view of the world the irrationality of which expresses itself in the imperative of both giving and meaning,

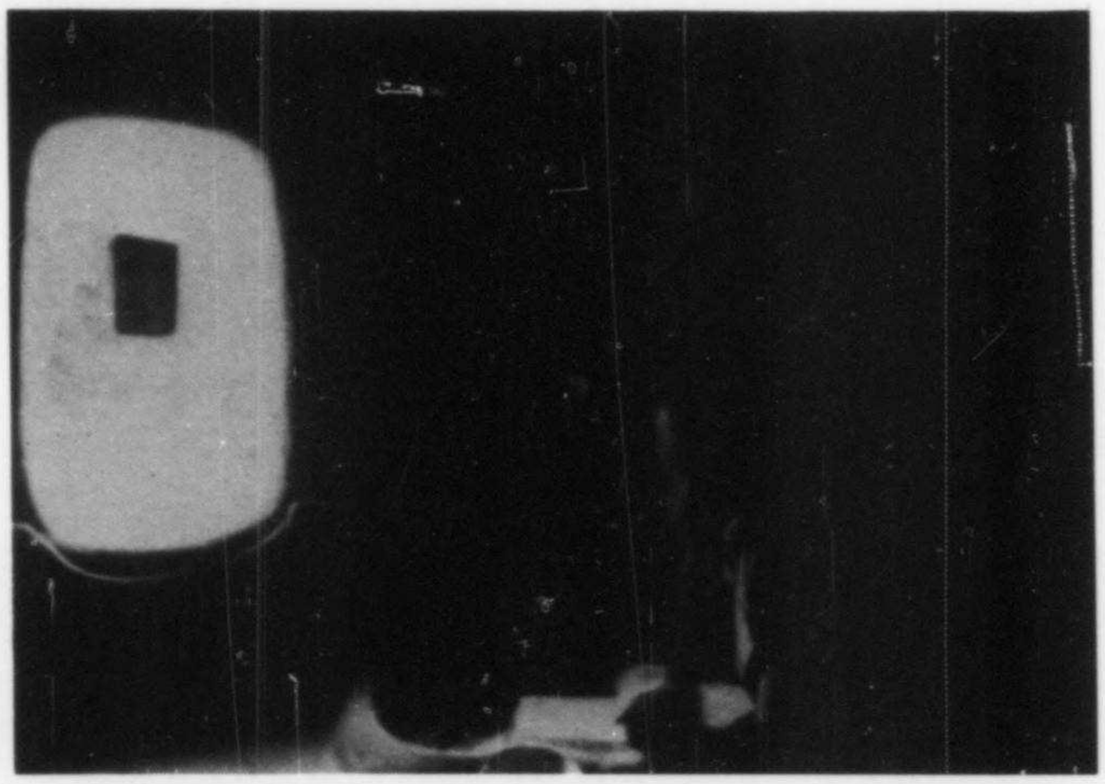
23. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, p. 14.
24. Maurice Blanchot, in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. L. Davis, Tarrytown, New York, Station Hill Press, 1981, p. 104.
25. Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," p. 214.

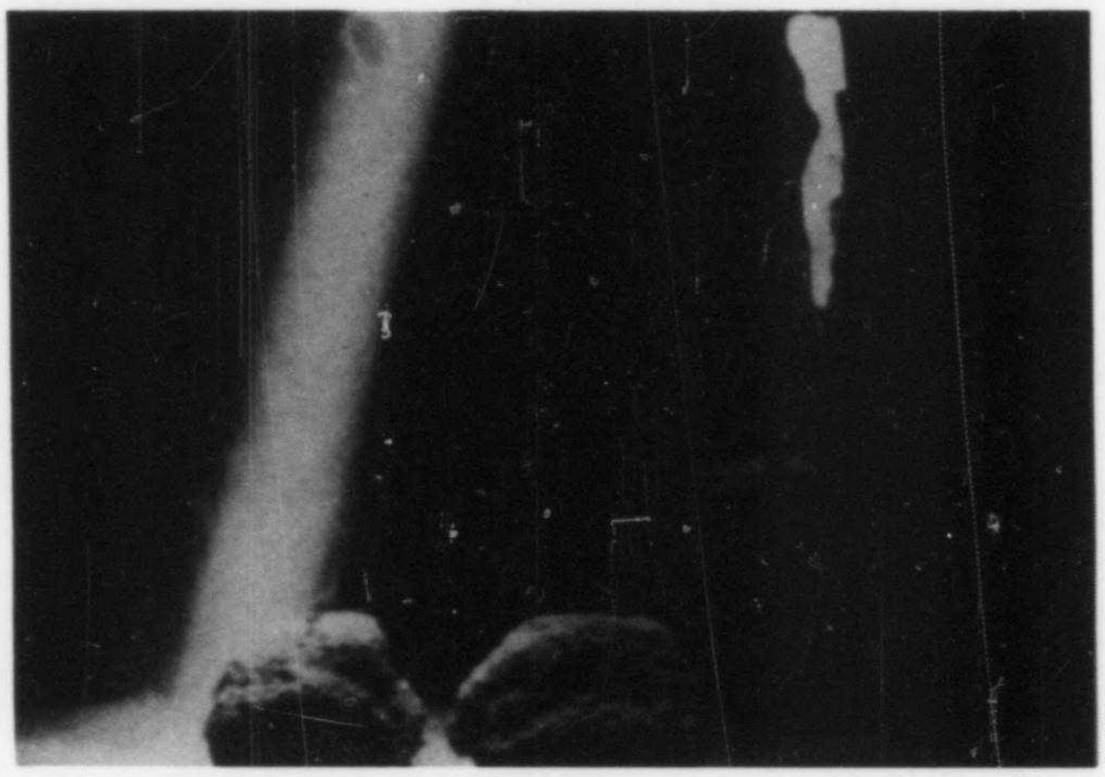
and the irreality of which manifests itself in the need to require that visual and verbal constructs yield meaning down to their last detail. *The West moistens everything with meaning, like an authoritarian religion which imposes baptism on entire people.*[26] Yet such illusion is real; it has its own reality, one in which the subject of Knowledge, the subject of Vision, or the subject of Meaning continues to deploy established power relations, assuming Himself to be the basic reserve of reference in the totalizing quest for the referent, the true referent that lies out there in nature, in the dark, waiting patiently to be unveiled and deciphered correctly. To be redeemed. Perhaps then, an imagination that goes toward the texture of reality is one capable of working upon the illusion in question and the power it exerts. The production of one irreality upon the other and the play of non-sense (which is not mere meaninglessness) upon meaning may therefore help to relieve the basic referent of its occupation, for the present situation of critical inquiry seems much less one of attacking the illusion of reality as one of displacing and emptying out the establishment of totality.

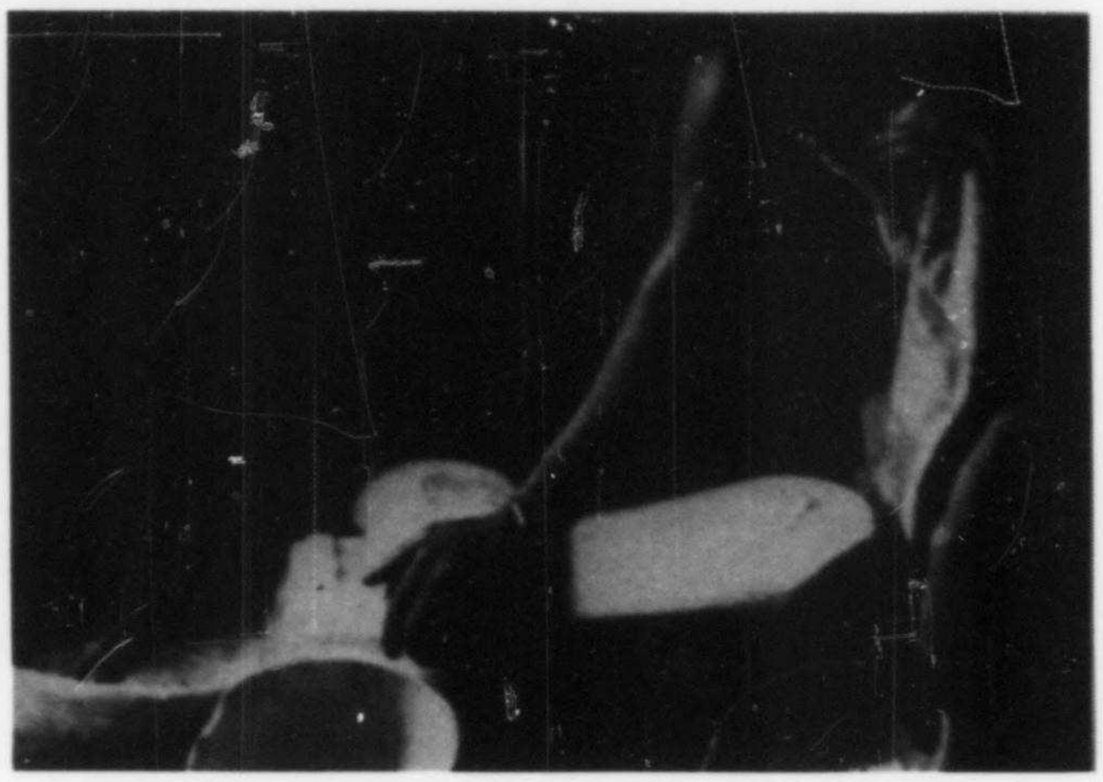


From India. *Work-in-Progress.*

26. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard, New York, Hill & Wang, 1982, p. 70.







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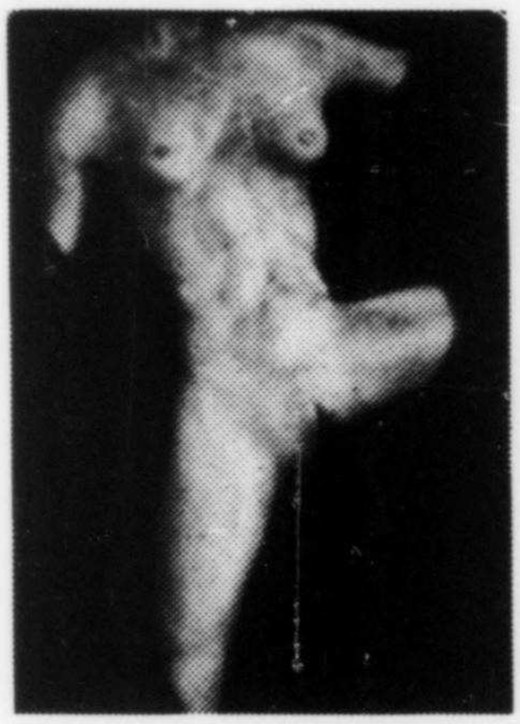

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OCTOBER is funded in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and from the New York State Council on the Arts. The editors would also like to acknowledge the generous support of the following individuals and foundations:

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